

Greetings from

MOUSE HOLEAVEN

A Guided Tour of
THE MEL BIRNKRANT COLLECTION
VOLUME ONE
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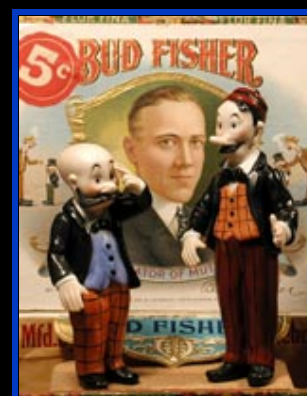
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INTRODUCTION

"The Birnkrant Collection of Mickey Mouse & Comic Characters" was christened "MOUSE HEAVEN" by our good friend, Kenneth Anger, many years ago, long before he made his film of the same name. Although, the Collection encompasses the vast expanse of Comic Character Imagery, beginning at the Turn of the 20th Century, right up through the early 1940s, and is about much more than merely Mickey. The title "stuck", and over time, in my own mind, it came to include Everything!

When I was young, I did believe in Everything: God, Santa Claus, and the Easter Bunny. And I still do, to some degree. I also knew that if I was good, and never naughty, I would, one day, go to Heaven. Although, "Mouse Heaven" was not exactly what I had in mind. Who would have guessed I'd be so Lucky?



A collection, like this, can only happen, once in a lifetime, and by some twist of fate, that lifetime happened to be mine. For better, or for worse, the likes of it could never be amassed again. So this is it, about as good as Comic Character Collecting gets. To duplicate what you are about to see would require just three things: 1. Infinite resources. 2. A Time Machine, you'd have to be there, either living from 1890 to 1945, or be in attendance at all the great flea markets, antique shows, and toy shows on the East Coast, for the past 50 years, and be able to run faster than me. And, finally, 3. You'd have to BE me. All this only looks haphazard, actually, its unified by a single vision. Everything here is related, It all goes together, in a way that few perceive.

I Collect Icons and Images from "The Golden Age of Comic Characters", beginning with the origin of the first Comic Characters in the late 1890s, through their development in the first half of the Twentieth Century, leading up to the Great Explosion of Creativity, between the two World Wars that culminated in the birth of "Mickey Mouse"! I am seeking Visually Exciting Objects that represent the many Deities in the Pantheon of Comic Characters, from "The Yellow Kid" to "Mickey Mouse", including "Felix the Cat", "Popeye", "Betty Boop", "Bonzo", "Little Nemo", "Krazy Kat" and All the other "Funny Folks", from the most Famous to the most Obscure!

My main area of interest is not, primarily, "Original Art", or the form in which Comic Characters were originally portrayed by the renowned artists or studios who Created them, but, rather, in the way that these Images were Reinterpreted and Transformed by the hands of unknown "artists", mainly working under the umbrella of the manufacturing industry. Although, these craftsmen might never have thought of themselves as "artists", many of the objects and images they created, especially, when viewed through modern eyes, embody an "Intensity" and "Life", that Transcends the original subject matter, elevating it to the elusive and lofty realms of "ART"! Often, these unselfconscious Works of Art, took the form of children's "TOYS", Mini Masterpieces intended to be played with, enjoyed, and ultimately, destroyed! The fact that almost a century later, many have survived, is something of a Miracle."

I began collecting Iconic Imagery, seventy years ago, when I was five. Growing up in Berkley, Michigan, a tiny suburb of the then mighty Motor City, I was an only child, obsessed with Disney. In a World that seemed, and was, crushingly ordinary, I became a pint-sized connoisseur, seeking and savoring any tiny drop of the "extraordinary" that I managed to discover in my little World of Berkley. I had no idea of where this quest would lead me, but I felt that it was heading someplace, "Someplace Important." As I grew older, pint-sized became super-sized, and after a short hiatus, in which I mistakenly attempted to grow up, the quest continued, unabated. Along the way, I segued seamlessly from first to second childhood.

Now, at seventy-five, I have arrived at "Someplace," surrounded by a thousand objects, all prime examples of "extraordinary." And, in all this time, the one thing that I failed to discover, is the part about "Important." Thus, every day, I wonder what will become of all these treasures? They are the collective residue of over half a century of high adventure, hunting the mouse and other comic characters in a never-ending quest of discovery that led me from the "flea" infested fields of Brimfield, to the spacious grandeur of Atlantic City's Convention Center. And, throughout all that time, there was not a major toy or antique show on the Northeast Coast of the United States that I did not attend.

My "Bucket List" is a short one. It's not a list of things I want to do for fun, but, rather, a compilation of things I must get done. The foremost item on the list was a long overdue effort to document the Amazing carvings of my dear friend Charles Ponstingl. I accomplished that, last month. It was a fitting warm-up for the project now at hand, which is a far more daunting one. I hope to photograph and document my entire collection, and thus, preserve a record of what was in it, and how it was displayed.

The task is proving to be a monumental one, but at the very least, I aim to capture images of all of the many showcases, and how each one was set up. That, alas, will leave a thousand things unseen. There is no longer an inch of empty horizontal space on which to place another object, and not a foot of wall space left, on which to hang another frame. Thus, everything that's small or flat, books, art, boxed games, and stuff like that, is out of sight and put away. And every bookcase, cabinet, closet, drawer, and storage space under the floor is overflowing with more, much of which I'll never live to see again. Those things will escape the camera's eye, and mine.

Meanwhile, how to organize this vast array? Some aspects of it will be easy. I can filter out a few specific showcases that are dominated primarily by one character, and I suppose I should start there. Mickey Mouse is a different matter; simply put, he's everywhere! And as large as this building is, I've still had to squeeze Mickey in, wherever there was an empty space. So don't be surprised if you see his face in nearly every showcase. I guess, I'll just dive in and begin with elements I can treat as separate entities, and get them out of the way, then, let this Guided Tour begin, and go from there. The task is simply too big to present as a totality, I'll have to add a little, every day.

I might also point out that I'm not a historian. My interest in the items I collected all my life was always purely Visual. They are simply, flat out, Works of Art to me. So don't expect a history of the various characters they portray. As interesting as that may be, it was never what interested me. What I learned, along the way, about the various comic characters and their creators was purely secondary. That scant knowledge was only used as clues to help me find more of the same. Thus, my commentary, as we go along, will serve only one purpose, I will strive to help you see these Works of Art as Works of Art. But, be forewarned, you'll learn little of their stories, and who they were, historically. It's all about the way they look to me. These Icons are the Graven Images of would-be Gods and Goddesses, in the Comic Character Pantheon. I will present them as Iconic Idols, worthy recipients of Idolatry, and spare you the theology.



Have you ever seen the movie "Son of Kong"? In this sequel to "King Kong", Carl Denham returns to Skull Island and discovers Baby Kong. Little Kong is not a meanie, like his daddy, but sweet and gentle, a fraction of his father's size, but big enough. In the final moments of the movie, the sea is rushing in to swallow up Skull Island. Little Kong stands atop the highest point, Skull Mountain, with the ocean rising all around him. In his paw he holds Carl Denim, who was kind to him. As the waters rise and swallow Baby Kong, only his upraised paw remains in view, still holding his friend aloft. Just then, a lifeboat, carrying Carl's current lady friend, happens by. Denham is saved, as Little Kong, now empty handed, disappears beneath the waves.

That's what this website is about. I am holding my collection, my life's passion, in my upraised paw to protect it from the rising waters of old age. I don't expect a lifeboat to come along and rescue it, but, hopefully, at least, a memory of what it looked like in its heyday will be saved.

TOYS AS ART

Thinking about a title for this website, one that came to mind was “TOYS AS ART” or maybe “ART AS TOYS”? I couldn’t decide! They are both saying sort of the same thing, and both titles are timely in both the Art and Toy worlds of today. It seems there is a new category of toy and art, alike, that combines the two in spirit and in name. It is simply called “Art Toys”, a name that has a ring to it that sounds somewhat similar to a movement that was prominent in my day, one that had a far greater influence on the World of Art, and certainly on me, “Pop Art”.

Pop Art redefined what “Art” was all about. It proclaimed that Art might pop up anywhere, and even some commercial products made under the umbrella of industry might be considered “Works of Art”. Did this make the humble craftsmen who designed these products “artists”? Maybe not. The pretentiousness of the elite Art community deemed that those, who played the Art Gallery Game successfully, had merely to discover these commercial products, and proclaim them to be “art” by copying or enlarging them. And, thus, these individuals qualified as “artists,” while the craftsman who actually created the originals, did not.

Andy Warhol looked at a box of “Brillo” pads, and announced that it was “Art”. Then he printed up some replicas, and sold them for a fortune. The man who actually created the design was not as fortunate. Andy Warhol rose to fame, while the actual designer of the box continued to earn a relatively modest wage. He didn’t even qualify for 15 minutes of Fame. Somehow, the merits of a Brillo box escaped me. But if I chose to have one in my living room, today, I would prefer to visit the grocery store, and purchase “The Real Thing.”



Roy Lichtenstein looked at some old comic books, and realized the artwork was cool, so he chose carefully, and enlarged some of the imagery. He made it big enough to slap the viewer in the face, and say, “Hey, take a look at comic books! Some of the art is really GREAT!” In the elite Art World this statement made a splash. Meanwhile, in the Real World, any kid who read comic books could have told you that!

The 1961 painting on the left sold for \$43 million, in 2011. The Lichtenstein painting on the right is Roy's inept 1961 rendition of “Popeye”, oil on canvas! Is this what the Art World considers Great? Prints of it are available to frame! Elzie Segar must be turning over in his grave! I rest my case!



Here are two examples of “ Art Toys”, also referred to as “Urban Vinyl”. The Mickey Mouse on the left is by the popular artist Kaws. And the Mickey Mouse in the middle is by Ron English. His face resembles an incandescent light bulb. The original World War II Mickey Mouse gas mask is on the right.



Don't get me wrong, I think Art Toys are great. If I had been born fifty years later, I'd probably be creating them, today. Some Art Toys are highly original, with forms dictated, to some degree, by the approachable affordability of the vinyl medium, which tends to make them look, somewhat, alike. Others are playful variations on the icons and imagery that I have been collecting all my life. One small compensation for old age is the fact that I was there from the beginning to experience and savor the excitement and adventure of discovering “The Real Thing.”

While Pop Art was happening in the USA, I was unaware of it, in 1958, the year that I lived in Paris. Thus, my life altering moment of revelation, the instant that I realized that Toys could be Art, and visa-versa, took place simultaneously, but independently of the influence of Pop Art. As I have already recounted the experience, elsewhere, in a speech I gave, ten years ago, and I couldn't say it any better now, so, please, forgive me if I cut and paste:

“One fateful day, at the Paris Flea market, which at that time, was the only "Flea Market" in the world, I found myself standing and staring at a puzzling object, an object that was destined to profoundly alter the course of my entire life. And, here it is

This cast iron bank! It caught my eye from afar, shining like a beacon, amid a sea of ancient things. Although, younger than the stuff around it, this image was older than, and unlike any Mickey Mouse that I had ever seen. But it wasn't the Mickeyness of this object that attracted me. It was the fierce power of the image, the pure and unexpected geometry, the straight lines and sharp angles, the pointed snout, sharp elbows, and how they contrasted with and played off of the round elements of his anatomy. And then there was this subtle shift, as he gently leans to one side, not enough to destroy the symmetry, but just enough to keep him off balance, always in motion, and alive.



I found this to be a fascinating sculpture! But, alas, it was also Mickey Mouse. Although, I was a Disney fanatic as a child, the real Mickey Mouse was almost unknown to me. Donald Duck was popular in my day, and Mickey, by then, had almost gone away. What Mickey images I had seen, were 1940s Mickey at his wishy-washy worst, with pink face, eyeballs and chubby cheeks. Although, I had never seen a Mickey Mouse as powerful as this, he was still the symbol of everything I had rejected and outgrown. And a battle raged within me. Could I give in to the spell that this fierce, yet friendly, object was casting over me, and embrace it, in spite of the fact that it was Mickey? It seemed like hours passed, as I stood mousemerized.

I guess you're all wondering what happened. I won't keep you in suspense. I bought it! Considering that my Hotel room rent was the equivalent of \$30 a month, his price of \$10 dollars was not one to be taken lightly. This was no small purchase. But the money was not the issue, it was, instead, the inner conflict, that I finally resolved by convincing myself that this object was a sculpture, first, and Mickey, only, secondarily."

And thus began a lifetime of collecting. By this simple act of recognizing that this object I had found was Art, in 1958, when to all the rest of the world, it was not, and standing behind my conviction by paying what was, then, a painful price, I experienced all the emotional satisfaction that I would have if I had actually created this powerful object, myself. Maybe more so, for I was feeling all the joys of creativity, without any of the hard work involved, and the only pain was in my wallet.

Had I been a "Pop Artist", like Roy and Andy, I might have enlarged this cast iron Mickey. Or if I had the money, I could have telephoned the local foundry, like my friend Ernie Trova used to do, and commissioned them to do it for me. And I might have even had the audacity to sign my name to what they made, and thus, begin an art career. But being a purist, which I, even now, remain, I preferred to leave the statement as it was, "The Real Thing".

Meanwhile, although, I was unaware of Pop Art, there was another factor at play that fateful day at "le Marché aux Puces". I did realize, at the time, that I was finding a "Found Object", a "readymade"!

The Online Dictionary defines the term "Found Object" as: "A natural object or an artifact not originally intended as art, found and considered to have aesthetic value. Also called objet trouvé." Wikipedia, discussing Marcel Duchamp, describes the first "objet trouvé" in the following way: "The Bottle Rack (also called Bottle Dryer or Hedgehog) is an artwork created in 1914 by Dada artist Marcel Duchamp. Duchamp labeled the piece a "readymade", a term he used to describe his collection of ordinary, manufactured objects not commonly associated with art."

My closest friend, in Paris, the American artist, Robert Grosvenor, found such a bottle rack, one identical to the Marcel Duchamp original. He discovered it on the street, and dragged it back to his room at 9 Rue Git Le Coeur. These bottle drying racks were still in common use in France in 1958. It was Bob who introduced me to the concept of the "objet trouvé".



Looking back, I realize that, beginning at that moment in the Paris Flea Market, I have spent my life, my money, and most of my energy, finding objects, not intended to be "art", and elevating them to that, at least, in my own eyes. And the very act of recognizing the visual merits of humble works, intended merely to amuse children and later be discarded, became, for me, an act of creativity. And the moment of recognition, that instant of discovery, seeing the element of art in the works of unknown craftsmen, often toiling in the toy industry, became a way of "doing art" for me. Each new find was, essentially, a thrilling moment of creativity, spontaneous and instantaneous! At exhilarating times like these, I could sense my entire body tingling, and, ever so slightly, levitating.

In the early days, back in the United States, rescuing these treasures from an imagined garbage dump that, hypothetically, might become their destiny, became a sort of mission, one that I pursued with a passion, at every opportunity.

In later years, when antique dealers discovered that there were missionaries, like me, willing to spend large sums of money on these transitory trifles, now called "collectibles," the danger of their ending up in the city dump was no longer a possibility. Soon, it became collectors, who needed to be rescued ... from ever pending bankruptcy. Eventually there appeared a multitude of shows, flea markets, and auctions, culminating in eBay, the ultimate dumping place, where over a hundred and fifty thousand Mickey Mouse items are offered every day; today's number is 155,639. That's even more mice than there are in my collection! How many mice are there in my collection? In the web pages that follow, you will see.

THE BEGINNING

In an effort to organize this site, writing, taking new photographs, and finding old ones, I find that it is turning into a kind of history. That wasn't the original intention. But, I realize that it would give a wrong impression to imply that I saw that Mickey Bank at the Paris Flea Market and became a Mickey Mouse collector overnight. I didn't run out the next day and start buying every old Mickey Mouse in sight. The fact is, there wasn't any! Nor did I even contemplate that possibility. I never imagined, at the time, that there were any more wonderful Mickey Mouse images to find. The possibility didn't even cross my mind. I had yet to learn that there was once a wonderful time, in the years just before I was born, when Mickey was the King of Toys, and great imagery was not only commonplace, but the "norm". Thus, I regarded that moment of discovery at the Paris Flea Market as a one-time occasion. And, I didn't buy another Mickey Mouse, until over six years later.

I had come to Paris to see (and do) Art, and, hopefully, have a good time. In retrospect, I realize, I did much more of the later, than the former. And the art I saw was not found in the museums and galleries, but rather in the quaint shops, open air markets, and stalls, along the Seine. It was there that I discovered the toys and trifles of yesterday; a yesterday more colorful, and wonderful than my wildest daydreams in Detroit could ever contemplate.

There were treasures everywhere; one could find them lying on the street. I discovered this tiny candy tin, literally, among the litter in the gutter. It is a fierce and powerful image that became the subject of a painting. And talk about a trip down memory lane; when I, just now, went over to the cabinet to retrieve it and wipe away the dust of half a century, I discovered my oil paint covered finger prints, still imprinted on the edges, the only remaining evidence that a young man of twenty one, once hoped to be a painter.

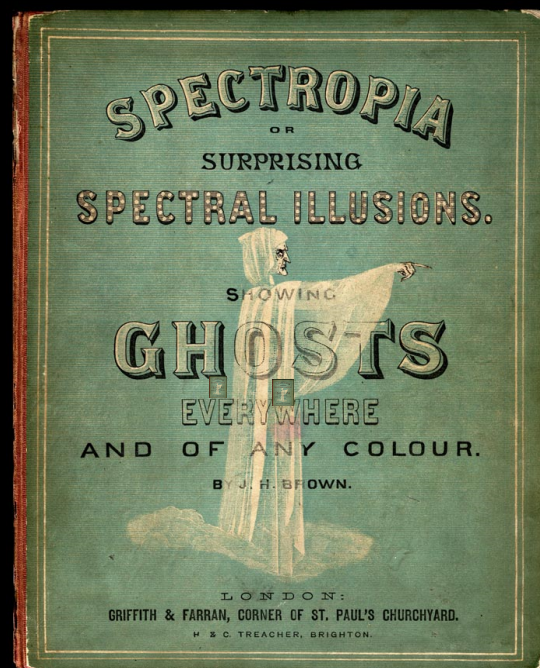


Unlike my childhood in Detroit, where, like those dinosaurs in "Fantasia", dragging across the barren desert, digging through the mud for water, I had to scratch and forage just to find a little magic in the 1950s world around me, in France, there was Enchantment everywhere. You could feel it, sense it, smell it in the air. And hear it! The music of the past hundred years was still on the radio. Tunes that Toulouse-Lautrec, himself, had heard at Le Moulin Rouge and Les Folies Bergère, were played in the Cafes. And Edith Piaf, singing "La Vie en Rose" was still number one on the French Hit Parade



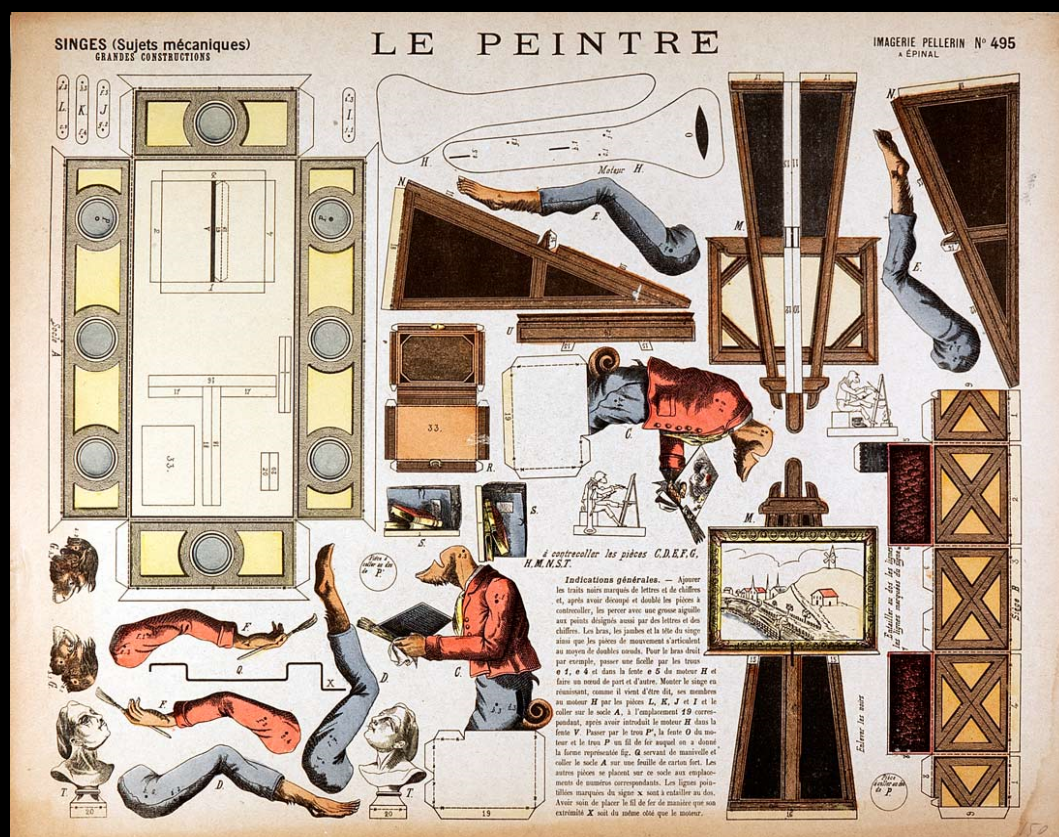
How incredible were the things that I discovered there? Here is an example. This amazing volume was published in 1863. It not only permits the reader to see dramatically effective ghosts, in living (or dying) color, by means of a series of hand colored optical illusion inducing illustrations, but it also explains in “scientific” terms, the most likely causes of spirit sightings in real life, which, apparently, in the era of candlelight, were commonplace phenomena.

Just along Rue Mazarine, a block away from my hotel, was the most phantasmagorical of shops, “La Librarie Labarre”. Monsieur Claude Labarre, was an Englishman, who had lived all his life in France. As a young man, he had been one of the inner circle that included, Picasso, Hemmingway, F. Scot Fitzgerald, and Henri Matisse. Along with them, he regularly frequented Saturday night soirees, at the Salon of Gertrude Stein. He was readily inclined to reminisce with a customer, who could speak English, and I spent hours in his store, eagerly listening to his stories, and marveling at the artifacts on display. The best way I can describe the contents of la Librarie Labarre would be to equate it to George Mèlées’ toy stand in le Gare Montparnasse, as portrayed in the movie “Hugo”. And each time I visited, I never left without, at least, a sheet, or two, or more, of images d’Epinal .



These fabulous hand colored, paper cut outs, required only a little skill and a lot of patience to construct a multitude of wondrous things, from fantastic toy theatres, featuring characters from the Commedia dell’ Arte, to vehicles, ships and airships, and every form and shape of building, both fantastic and historic. These beautifully drawn pages contained everything necessary to recreate the 19th Century, and before, in miniature.

“Before,”included a Noah’s Ark, complete with all the animals on three oversized sheets. I would pour over the many stacks of these for hours. Each Stack reached a height of several feet. My favorites were intricate mechanical paper toys, such as the Monkey Artist, Polichinelle battling the Devil, and the cat pump, or “Pompe a Chats” a 19th Century Rube Goldberg like device that literally pumps out cats. And, slowly but surely, I acquired several hundred images d’Epinal. I still have them all.



Back in the United States, some of the items we produced as "Boutique Fantastique" were based on these. I think the idea began when I made this complex music box as a Christmas gift for Eunice, the year that we were married, and living in Ann Arbor. It was essentially an image d'Epinal, one of many miniature circuses. I adapted it to a music box. My customization was incredibly complex. Three converging circles of equestrian riders moved in opposite directions, all at different speeds. While, above, a wheel of colored gelatin filters rotated. Illuminated by four small battery powered bulbs, the lighting in the box became a blaze of ever moving color that was triggered to go on and off with the music. On top of that, the miniature ringmaster even moved his tiny arm to crack his paper whip!

I had been bitten by the collecting bug, at the one and only "Marché aux Puces," the "Market of Fleas"! And, thus, when I returned to the United States, I had to travel by boat instead of plane, so I could bring all these treasures back with me. They were an incredible menagerie. Among them, was a life sized pig from a French carousel, with a mirror studded bridle, that now rides a stainless steel pole, extending from the counter top to the ceiling, and dominates our kitchen. There was also an extensive collection of Victorian Toy Theatres, and hundreds of uncolored sheets of plays.

Seeing a Marvelous Toy Theatre, when I was 10, resulted in a quest that led me to travel across the Channel to visit London, and spend two days in Pollack's Toy Museum. The new owner, Marguerite Fawdry, was a delightful lady. In 1958, she had just acquired the Museum, and found herself in a huge unheated building in the middle of winter, with only a small electric heater, overwhelmed by the accumulated stock of 100 years of manufacturing Victorian Toy Theatres.



She was in over her head, and needed all the assistance she could get. By the time those two days were over, I knew more about her inventory, than she did. And I left with a collection of hundreds of Victorian Toy Theatre sheets. Throughout the 19th century these sold for "a penny plain, or tuppence colored." They cost nearly the same in 1958. The following year I actually mounted a production on one of these small stages for a class at the University of Michigan. Marguerite Fawdry was a spirited lady; she later visited us in NYC, gallantly climbing the five floors to our illegal loft on 26th Street, even though, she had a wooden leg.

In France, I also discovered the wonder of early optical toys, and obtained a marvelous Zoetrope (that we later reproduced as Boutique Fantastique), and the most glorious optical toy of all, the incredibly complex and amazing "Praxinoscope Theatre." In this unique invention, images, reflected in rotating mirrors, transform seamlessly, and shutter free, appearing to move and exist in three dimensional space, amid scenery that is also only a reflection. When the candle light is adjusted, just right, and both reflections are equalized, the combination is perfection, and one beholds a tiny world, populated by minute living beings.

It is a world that is neither here nor there, but floats elusively in midair, somewhere in the space between the rotating device and the viewer's eye. This experience cannot be captured by a camera. Even seeing it in person, one is inclined to ask the question: Could this be real, or is it merely an illusion? Rarer than the device, itself, is the original paper shade. Is it any wonder, operating as it does, balanced precariously, above a burning flame?



Also traveling with me on the Queen Mary was an entire family of antique dress maker manikins. The Mommy was the size of a circus fat lady, with a dress size over 50. The Daddy had beautifully articulated wooden hands, and stands in the corner of the big room, today, wearing Mr. Peanut's shell and top hat, originally from the Boardwalk at Atlantic City. And the son, was a handsome lad, in spite of the fact that he had no arms or head.

And then there is my marvelous Polichinelle, who cost a whole month's rent of 30 dollars, a sum that took me several months to pay. This figure is full of the essence of the kind of "life" that on occasion endows inanimate objects with a presence so powerful that it cannot be denied.

Can you look into his eyes and say with certainty that he is not looking back at you? He is well over 100 years old. What sights have those eyes seen in all that time? And what tales would he tell if he could speak? I have met much wiser men than I, one being the World's greatest puppeteer, Albrecht Roser, who maintains that he, Polichinelle, and images like him, possess a soul.



In the loft on 26th Street, we worked all year, creating things that only sold at Christmas. And thus, there were some lean months in the summer. But as the Holidays approached, business picked up, and, suddenly, we had money. We celebrated this annual good fortune by throwing a lavish Thanksgiving party. And for the month that followed, we went a little crazy, buying each other Christmas presents. It was at that time of year that my collection grew. I knew just what to add to my Christmas list. And Santa, working through Eunice, was very good to me. By April, we were broke again, but Oh, the holidays were great!

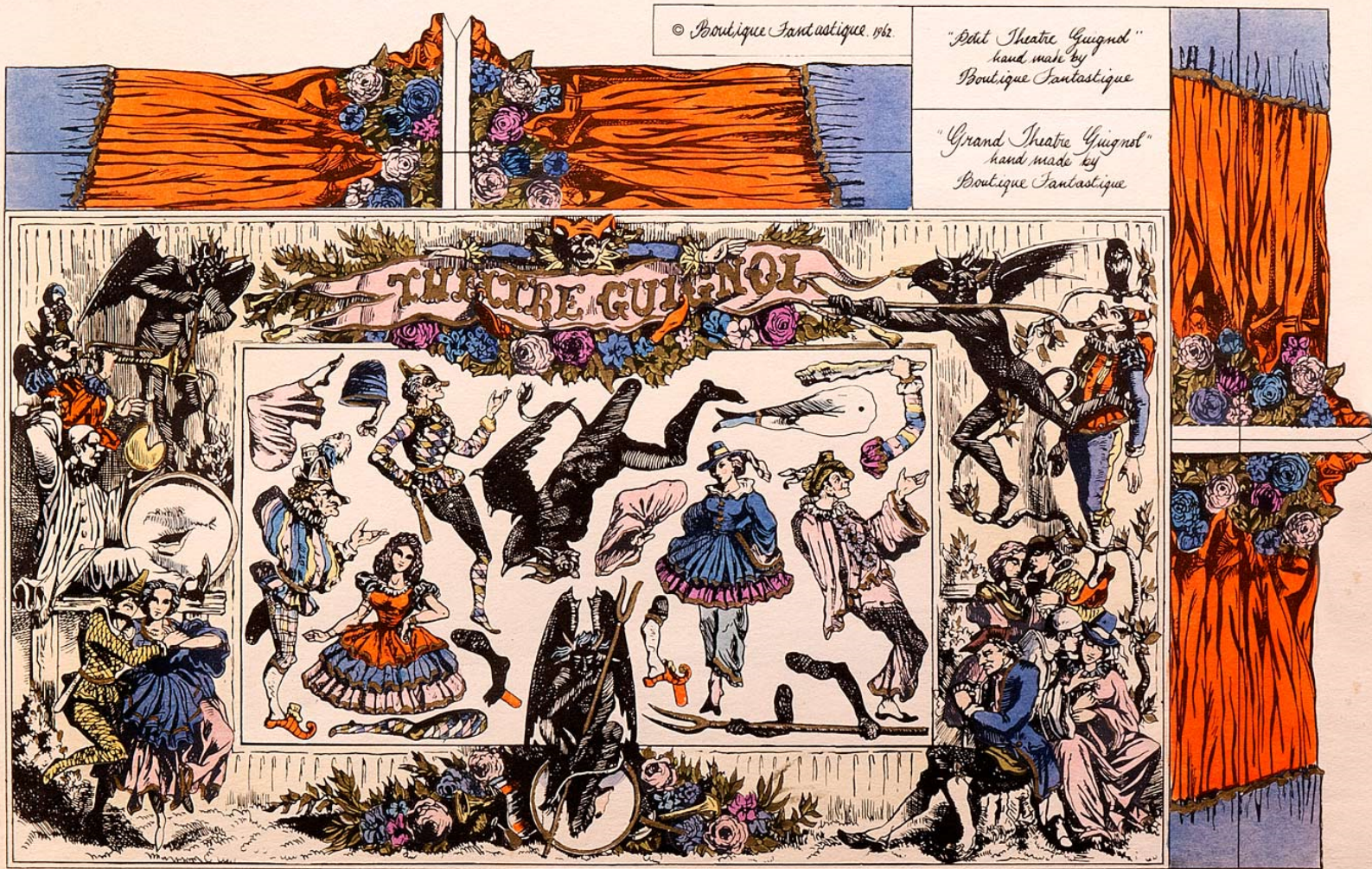
When we made the giant leap to a rent controlled apartment on 28th Street, with a new loft for work, around the corner on Lexington. I could get to work, like a cat burglar, by pussy-footing, from one rooftop to the other. The former tenants were good friends. One night, during the transition, we went out to eat together in a small restaurant across the street that had only one table, and served only one group, each night. It was called "The Tomb for Dead Lovers." The place was rather atmospheric, a fairyland of twinkling lights, decorated with exotic antiques, many of which were for sale. And there it was, among the phantasmagorical decor, my second Mickey. The price was \$15 dollars. Incredibly, I left without it. Eunice secretly got it for me for Christmas. Our upstairs neighbor was outraged. "\$15. for that? Ridiculous!"

Not ridiculous, Glorious! It was the Ideal Composition doll, and a revelation to me. This dazzling image was like a celestial vision. It revealed the fact that there were other great Mickeys out there. The thought hadn't occurred to me. It's not like I had seen any.



Many of the images that caught my eye in France embodied the characters of the Commedia dell' Arte, little known in America, Harlequin, Columbine, Clown and Pantaloon, Pierot, Pierette, Punchinello and Polichinelle, or Punch across the English Channel. These often appeared in Shadow Theatres and other objects I continued to collect, although, they were hard to find back in the States. And they were featured in the things we made as Boutique Fantastique.

Here is a sheet based on an imagerie d' Epinal that was part of the visible components of one of the animated music boxes we made as Boutique Fantastique. I had to redraw this from scratch, which was the only way that it could be reproduced. Then, the black lines were printed on white card stock, and colored by hand, a hundred sheets at a time, using the same method as the original, a process that involves stencils and a special brush, known as "pouchoire" in France, and utterly unknown in the United States. I just noticed that the date, in Eunice's handwriting, below, is 1962. My God! That was 50 years ago!



Eventually, things fell into place, and I realized that Comic Characters were America's Commedia dell' Arte! And with that realization, the Collection as it appears today, was off and running. Thus, when we moved to 28th street, I built a wall in our small apartment, to preserve and display some of the things I had been acquiring over those years, après Paris. You can see it here. This is the only existing photo that shows almost the entire wall. It was taken shortly before we moved Upstate. As you can see, I was already running out of space. You might also notice a rosy glow reflected in the glass of one of the showcases on the left. That is the reflection of a large Neon Clock.



My friend, Al Horen, who was a major figure in the early days of Mouse Collecting, discovered an original Mickey Mouse Electric Clock. It blew my mind! In this surreal masterpiece of Ingersoll ingenuity, the figure of Mickey cleverly rotates, topsy turvy, every 60 seconds. His nose is the sweep second hand. Convinced that I would never be lucky enough to find one of these small treasures, I decided to make my own, only bigger! Al, kindly, let me photograph his. I found a huge old octagonal neon clock at the 26th street Flea Market, for 15 dollars. Ah, Those were the days! Now the trick would be, getting the mouse to rotate. I cut the Mickey image out of aluminum. and glued coins in place behind him, to serve as counterweights. Powered by a seperate motor of his own, Mickey still rotates perfectly to this day, and the red and blue neon tubes still combine their basic colors to magically radiate a rosy glow. Alas, the clock, itself, stopped working, years ago.



[illegible]

Gazing at the photo above, I find myself lost in reverie. The tiny objects in that box are not merely objects, they are memories, meaningless, I guess, to anyone but me; I wonder if I can convey some of the wonderment I see.

By the way, for those of you who would like to move one step closer to experiencing what it is like to see the objects in this collection in person, I will share a secret with you. Would you like to see the photographs, throughout this web site, in 3-D? This may not work for everybody; a lot depends on the size and quality of both your imagination, and your computer screen. It also requires is a willingness to suspend disbelief. But it's worth a try: Just gaze at the photo above, then: Open your mind, and CLOSE ONE EYE! For some, the image will look as if you're actually gazing into the showcase. Viewing these photos with one eye closed will make the showcases appear deep, and objects that are photographed against black, will look as if they float in space.



I'll begin with the young man in a sailor suit. That's little me, circa 1943! Photos mounted on wood, and hand tinted commercially, were fashionable in those days. The bisque doll is an uncanny lookalike, a resemblance that Eunice pointed out to me, so I dressed him in similar attire as a Christmas present for her. Next to both of me, is a dancing poodle that we crafted as Boutique Fantastique. This miniature piece of insanity was suggested by the Henri Bendel buyer, Frank McIntosh. He insisted that it would be a best seller. It was, actually! Luxurious ladies bought these, as Christmas presents for their pets, at \$150 apiece. This was the only sculpting that I did in the ten years between art school and the Outer Space Men in 1968. The petite French Poodle, dressed like Pierot, pirouetted to the tune of "C'est Si Bone", while a blown glass balloon floated, weightlessly, above his head. Pinned to the wall, behind my own, is a perfectly cut row of paper dolls that I picked up on a Paris street. On the other side, is a stick pin of The Yellow Kid.



And above that, (This you won't believe.) over the tiny Kewpie's head, is a teeny tiny box that holds a pair of fleas. They are perfectly attired as a bride and groom, and nearly too small to see. I am not referring to the enormous pair of 2" inch celluloid Kewpies dressed similarly, on the right, but that minute hand crafted box to the left of them. I was told they came from Mexico.



I could continue this all day! I'll mention a few more things, then, we'll leave. Pinned to the wall, high up on the left side, is the optical device, a 19th century advertising giveaway that I later adapted to become Tricky Mickey, one of the best selling Colorforms toys I ever made.



The Mice in the showcase are all post Paris additions, but very early acquisitions, nonetheless. Here is a fiercely beautiful pair of Mickey and Minnie bisques from Germany. These are minute in size, but monumental in their stark iconic imagery. One of the keys to appreciating the beauty of these, and all icons of any kind, lies in the viewer's ability to willingly suspend all consciousness of size. Can you visualize these tiny idols as 10 feet tall, or imagine yourself as very small? All the images in this collection are best encountered eye to eye.

The dapper figure in the center is a celluloid windup dancing toy, suspended on a nearly invisible filament. I just realized that he is the first windup toy I ever purchased. On his back, are the wings of a real butterfly. At his feet, is a tiny Austrian bronze Mickey Mouse Orchestra. This is the only complete set I've ever seen.



To the right of these, is a tiny painted bronze of “Der Struwwelpeter” or “Slovenly Peter”, with real fur hair, kneeling in prayer. Perhaps he is praying that the nasty scissor man won’t snip off his fingers, as in that masterpiece of German humor. Next to him, is a horny little bat-winged satyr, and a Pierot tape measure.



And high above them, on the wall, is an Austrian bronze Ascension Balloon. Its tiny passengers, a mouse and a frog, are hardly bigger than the newlywed fleas. They are involved romantic



In the lower right hand corner of the case, is a French tin lithographed bank that is a candy vending machine. The original chocolates are still inside it, much nibbled on by fleas. In the other corner, is a marvelous mechanical toy, a pot metal acrobat with artfully articulated legs, controlled by pressing buttons. He can perform amazing feats, balancing, bouncing and spinning a wooden ball with his feet. Note the remnants of gold paper tape, affixed to the ball diagonally. They are cleverly placed to both avoid the wear of kicking feet, and at the same time, allow the viewer to perceive the fact that the ball rotates. As a toy designer, I have learned to appreciate such simple things.



There is another showcase in my studio, upstairs, that also contains objects from the early days. It too is full of marvelous things that are somewhat overpowered by the spectacular clown automaton that dominates the case. He operates for a long time on one winding, looking from side to side, and sticking out his tongue, in a fashion that is almost obscene.

The showcase also contains a group of harmless novelties that represent early attempts at being naughty. They include a lovely German bisque lady, on the left, who lifts her nighty, above a crystal goblet that the heat of ones touch, on the blown glass bulb behind her, causes to bubble up and fill with yellow liquid.



Another favorite is "The Pan American Midway Dancer" It is a miracle that this fragile optical toy has survived since 1901, especially in view of the fact that the directions suggest : "To see this figure dance, open Front and Back Cover, then light a match and move same back of the picture up and down, across and in a circle, and you will see this figure go through all the motions of an Oriental dancer" and then, no doubt, burst into flame! "Patent Applied For"



Here too is a glorious Shadow Theatre that can, among other things, replicate a dazzling multicolored fireworks display. Other early optical toys, and a beautiful Spear's Royal Circus, with beautifully printed and embossed articulated clowns and animals, fill out the case.



From here we will continue to Comic Characters. I'll begin with Betty Boop, for no particular reason, other than the fact that I first met her in France, and the evolution of the casual quest to discover her, in the beginning, had much to do with my becoming a Comic Character collector, in the end.

BETTY BOOP

When I was living in Paris, the Cinémathèque française was a cinema museum where my friends and I often went to see great movies, free. I remember seeing Eisenstein's Masterpieces, "Alexander Nevsky", and "Ivan the Terrible", with subtitles in French, as well as Salvador Dali's epics "Chien Andalou" and "L'Age d'Or". It was there, too, that I first saw films by Kenneth Anger, "Eaux d'Artifice" and "Scorpio Rising". Ten years later, Ken, who coined the phrase "Mouse Heaven" would become a family friend. And it was there, at the Cinémathèque française that I first met, and fell in love with Betty Boop.

One night, a single Betty Boop cartoon was added to the evening's program as an extra diversion. It was a stunning revelation. Growing up in Detroit Michigan, Walt Disney and animated cartoon characters, in general, had been my nourishment, and my salvation. They were the source of inspiration that directed my destiny along the road to Disney, and beyond, to art school. And, so, it seemed utterly incredible that, in all those years, I had never seen or heard of Betty Boop.

The cartoon that was shown that night was one of Betty's worst, "Zulu Hula", a late offering, created when her career was waning, as she was being forced into oblivion by overzealous censorship. On top of that, the cartoon was full of the worst kind of racial stereotypes; as was often the case, when comic characters, especially, Mickey Mouse, came face to face with cannibals, in the 1930s. Worse still, the movie featured Grampy, who always did his best to steal the show. So there was very little of Betty in the movie, and yet, there was enough. Even though she was toned down and buttoned up, she spoke in that adorable voice, and radiated her innocently alluring sex appeal, and that was enough to steal my heart, and make me fall in love with her that night; love at first sight.

Where had she been hiding all my life? The world of Disney that I was raised on was relentlessly antiseptic, devoid of any hint of sexuality. Snow White was loveable and charming, appealingly innocent and irresistible. But the other Disney heroines who followed her, from the equine bobby soxers, who frolicked in Fantasia to Cinderella, and Sleeping Beauty, were as vacuous as beauty queens. And, suddenly, here was Betty Boop, the offspring of Max Fleisher, who I later learned was often referred to as, "the Jewish Disney." I loved the way she looked. She turned the stereotypes of beauty upside down. Her head was grossly oversized, her body was less than petite, with minutely tiny hands and feet. And yet, in spite of these extreme excursions, beyond the borders of what was considered pretty, she was beautiful to me. And, unlike my purely visual interest in other comic characters, in Betty's case, I loved her warm infectious personality, and her incredible voice. Everybody knew that she was sexy. Everyone, that is, but Betty. And that innocence is what made her so appealing. And that was it, seven minutes I would never forget. Like Dante, I had glimpsed my Beatrice, and we didn't meet again for several years.

Fast forward to 1963. My wife, Eunice, and I were living and working in an illegal loft on 26th street in Manhattan. We were just beginning an enterprise called Boutique Fantastique. All day, every day, we sat at a large table made from a 4' X 8' sheet of plywood on sawhorses, hand making music boxes and reproductions of nonexistent antiques. It was a humble way to, almost, make a living.

Our infant daughter, Samantha, played in a playpen beside us, often watching a small black and white TV. Half an hour, every weekday, at lunch time, two Betty Boop Cartoons miraculously aired on NYC TV. One Betty Boop began the show, followed by a horrible made for TV travesty called "Powwow the Indian Boy", after which there was another Betty Boop cartoon. This became the highlight of the day. Over the course of a year, we saw almost all of them. Then, sadly, they went away.

Moving forward several more years: Now, we are living in an apartment on 28th street. And, one day, cutting through Willoughby's Camera Emporium to take a short cut from Macys to Gimbal's, I discovered that they were selling used 16 mm movies, and they had some Betty Boop sound cartoons for \$10 each. That was a lot of money, but, every now and then, I would purchase one or two of these, even though, I didn't own a projector, yet. It seemed that no one was buying them, but me. And, over time, I acquired all they had. I came to learn that these were the actual prints that we had seen, years before, on TV. The station had been dumping them.

Meanwhile, I discovered another source of prints, as well. And soon, I came to own more than 100 16 mm Betty Boop cartoons and an old sound projector that formerly belonged to the actor, Fredric March, on which to show them. Like many of the toys I collected, early on, I bought them, solely, so I could see them. I still have them today. They are amazing! Eventually these same cartoons became available in fabulous complete sets for VCR and laser disk. The video tape set was so cleverly packaged that I never removed the cellophane. Inexplicably, a complete compilation has never been released on DVD. Nonetheless, many of the best Betty Boop cartoons can now be seen on You Tube.



It is amazing how popular Betty is today, her image, anyway, and at the same time, how little known she really is. Few of those who collect her likeness on merchandise have ever seen, or heard, a Betty Boop cartoon. All of Betty's films had one element in common: This was life seen through a different lens than Disney. Unlike Mickey, who was raised on Kansas corn, Betty was born and bred in New York City. And while Mickey was cutting up to the strains of "Turkey in the Straw", Betty was belting out her often suggestive songs to the accompaniment of the leading Jazz musicians of the day, from Louis Armstrong to Cab Calloway.

Betty started out life as a dog, a poodle to be precise, Bimbo's canine girlfriend, and metamorphosed before the public's eyes. Soon her dog ears became earrings and she not only became human, but also more exquisitely defined. Throughout, her voice remained unchanged, irresistibly adorable! For most of her career it was the voice of Mae Questel, who also created the voice of Olive Oyl in the early Fleischer Popeye cartoons. Eunice and I actually met Mae Questel. She visited us in Mouse Heaven, and she is, truly, Betty Boop, in person. That amazing voice in the cartoons, and some of Betty's mannerisms, too, are patterned after Mae, just being herself, and absolutely charming. She enjoyed seeing so many artifacts of her days as Betty Boop, some of which, surprisingly, she'd never seen before.

Around 1966, I met and became friends with Kenny Kneitel, who was Max Fleisher's Grandson. Kenny's mother, Ruth was Max's daughter, and his Father, who'd passed away two years before, was Seymour Kneitel, Fleisher's head animator. Kenny, his mother, and a few other family members were all that remained of Fleisher Studios, and they owned the rights to Betty Boop.

Kenny had a shop in Manhattan, called "Fandango" that, along with "Michael Malce and Son", constituted the cutting edge of a movement referred to, at the time, as "Camp", and they specialized in selling definitive and off-beat merchandise. Kenny and I decided to manufacture the first Betty Boop product created since her untimely demise in 1939: "Betty Boop Incense." Kenny had a fabulous way with words, and he thought up most of the names and copy for the labels on the cylindrical canisters of powered incense. He also did the type, while I supplied the graphics, adapted from the only Betty Boop reference material available to us at the time, a meager handful of images that were left to Kenny by his grandfather Max.

Together, we travelled to the incense manufacturer in Long Island city. The creepy owner of this operation was a genuine excentric, who eyed us with extreme suspicion. The incense he produced was intended to be used seriously in the practice of Voodoo and Black Magic. It was purported to have Mystical Powers for casting spells and incantations. It also brought good luck in love, as well as gambling, numbers and the ponies! We bought an unhealthy supply of plain brown cardboard canisters that contained six different colored flavors of powdered incense, enough to get us started. When the label art was finished, we had it printed on six different shades of colored paper, so they could be mixed and matched and thus, each set of six flavors would be different. I still have a box containing hundreds of these printed labels, and also some of the original canisters. I guess I should see if I can find them and put a set together. The other day, I noticed the original artwork for the labels, decaying in the basement.



Some of the flavors were “Peek-A-Boop”, “Happy Daze” and “Boop Oop-A-Doop”. Betty’s testimonial for that one proclaimed, “I always use it before I Boop, while I Oop, and after I Doop!” You could tell this was the Beatles era, on the “Magical Mystery Touring Incense” package, Betty reveals, “I never take a trip without it.” Betty’s “Peace Incense” carried the suggestion that you should “Burn it instead of your draft card.” The Copyright notice read, “© Fleischer Studios”, for one last time, never to be used again.

Kenny was a brilliant man, witty, perceptive, and a connoisseur of extraordinary things that few others had the eye or intellect to see. He discovered beauty in objects that, at the time, the rest of the World passed by. Life took on a new perspective with Kenny as your guide. And his discoveries could be purchased at Fandango. He put the incense out for sale in the store, and sold perhaps a dozen sets. Few knew who Betty Boop was in 1967.

Kenny had a Cameo Betty Boop doll, the only one that we had ever seen. It was given to him by his grandfather, Max Fleisher. It was in pretty sorry shape, and also had a missing hand. Nonetheless, I wanted her desperately, Uncle Max’s Betty. Compassionately, after a year of coaxing, Kenny agreed to sell her to me. And this became one of those occasions where I did an uncannily inspired restoration, beginning with her missing hand, then, touching up each chip and imperfection in her paint. In the process, I recreated every delicate eyelash, restored the highlights in her eyes, airbrushed her rosy cheeks, and brought her back to life again, right down to the perfectly detailed decal, with no one to guide me but the doll, herself. This rarity felt like a gift from Max Fleischer, to me, personally. Here she is, below, a year later, reunited with her old pal, Bimbo.



So that's how I began collecting Betty. Finding Betty Boop stuff wasn't easy. Around this time, 1968, I met my good friend John Fawcett. As pen pals, in the beginning, we wrote to each other often, and voluminously, exchanging drawings of our latest acquisitions, in a friendly competition to be the first to discover great things. And when we were offered a duplicate of something that we had already, we'd pass it on to the other. So, while we were in playful competition, we were also helping each other grow our parallel collections. Those were great days! We both placed ads in "Collectors News" and "The Antique Trader." Of course, we were both looking for Mickey Mouse, but to set our ads apart and not butt heads directly, John worded his ad to read, "Felix the cat and Mickey Mouse Items Wanted", and mine said "Betty Boop and Mickey Everything".

Isn't it amazing! Today there a hundred and fifty thousand Mickey Mouse items, offered every day on eBay. And I just checked; there are thirty eight thousand Betty Boops, listed today, all of which, except for one or two, are new. And there we were, John and I, the only ones collecting this stuff, or advertising for it, right there at the beginning, forty five years ago.

This haunting photograph of a store window full of Betty Boop dolls in her prime, was also a gift from Kenny's grandfather that Kenny passed along to me. On the back is written in red pencil "Window of Maurice Manne's Store". Manne's Toyland Inc. 2801 Boardwalk Atlantic City N.J, and a rubber stamp that reads Ritz Studio 2607 Boardwalk Atlantic City. N. J. This enchanting photo of a window is, itself, a window, looking back in time, to a toy store on the Boardwalk in Atlantic City, featuring the entire Betty line. We see Betty and Bimbo in all their variations, along with their original boxes, and the ghostly image of the photographer, himself, reflected in the glass. Could it possibly be Uncle Max? This tantalizing photo drove me absolutely Nuts!



And here it is, the total of all the Betty Boop items I was able to discover, over the past forty five years. This is testimony to how rare vintage Betty really is. And I only managed to amass as much as I did, because few knew who Betty Boop was, back then, and no one was more eager to collect her than I was.



I especially loved the Cameo wood jointed dolls, created by the great doll sculptor and manufacturer, Joseph Kallus. His Cameo Doll Company created almost all the composition and wood comic character dolls, throughout the 1930s and early 40s. And each one was a work of art! I found his Betty Boop doll irresistible, and every time a decent one appeared, I'd add her to the chorus line. Here too, are Joseph Kalluses' images of Betty's buddy Bimbo. Ironically, the rarest dolls in this cabinet are the small wooden versions, on the right, also made by Cameo. These are proof that being rare does not necessarily make something attractive. Here, Betty's face is just a decal, and her head is rectangular, like the Frankenstein monster. On the opposite side of the case, is an autographed photograph of Uncle Max, holding tiny Betty in his hand.



This Betty showcase is my Favorite. In the center is an amazing doll, made in Spain. She still has the original foil label from a Barcelona toy store on her back. This dynamic image captures Betty's early look. She's less refined here than she appears in the Cameo doll. Her delicate fingers are made of tin. Here, also, is an amazing wooden wall clock, carved by hand, in Japan. Its animated celluloid eyes look from side to side. This clock was made before the War and continued to appear, marked "occupied" after the War was over. There is an earlier more refined version, as well, that I just recalled is in the hall.



The string holder on the wall behind was once broken in two, right down the middle. It is an example of one of my, if I do say so myself, incredible repairs.

This showcase also shows two exceedingly rare Schoenhut items of KoKo the clown, a jointed doll, that, like KoKo himself, predates Betty by several years. The Hollywood camera that KoKo is using was also made by Schoenhut. So the teaming up of these two pieces is not arbitrary. The same figure offered as a marionette, which is legitimate and the only known example of KoKo in this form





And here is the rare pocket watch, and its even rarer box. The one on the left displays its engraved back. Assorted pins, flipbooks, and autographed fan cards, a rare black dress version of a celluloid doll, and two mid-sized Cameo Bimbos fill out the case.



Now let's go upstairs; there are two more primarily Betty cases, up there. This one is kind of full of odds and ends. It was not exactly carefully planned, but there still are some interesting things. One being, the only Betty Boop Halloween costume I've ever seen. There is also a strange paper mask made in Spain, a Betty ukulele, a soft doll with a fat body, and a tin lithographed watering can that is one of those rare items that illegally picture Betty Boop and Mickey Mouse together. In the middle at the bottom, is an original piece of art that Kenny gave me, a charming Christmas card in pen and ink with Betty Bimbo and KoKo, drawn by animator Leonard McCormick.



The case, below, is more carefully thought out. The most knock out gorgeous item in it is the "The Betty Boop Cartoon Lesson Set". My mouth was watering for this, ever since I saw a picture of it in an old Playthings magazine in the NY Public Library Annex, years before. I can't believe I actually got one, mint with everything, the lesson book, the Betty Boop pad, pens, pencils, crayons, and even a Betty Boop eraser. One other example of this item has recently turned up.

Apart from that, there are two interesting stuffed Bimbo dolls, one plush, the other velvet. That handsome black and white Bimbo leap-frogging over a bump, is actually, a Spanish jug. The liquid pours out of his snout. And there are two porcelain ashtrays, both of which are scarce. One is Betty and Bimbo, and the other, outrageously, is Betty Boop and Flip The Frog! Betty dated a lot of strange characters, from dogs to clowns, but surely this is the most unusual. Perhaps he turns into a prince when kissed? Then there is a celluloid Bimbo baby rattle, and a Bimbo fan that pictures him playing the piano with a small Mickey-like mouse atop it, belting out a song.



Last but not least, mint in the box is a piece of Betty Boop sculptural soap. John Fawcett passed this on to me. He was never really into Betty

And last of all, a trot around the house to see what's there. There's a little bit of Betty mixed in everywhere. Some of which we'll encounter later.

OH, here's a Banner that hung outside of movie theatres, on days that they were showing a Betty Boop Cartoon. And Here's the clock I mentioned earlier.





On the left, is a hard to photograph panel of original animation art. The ins and outs of getting it could fill a book. And when I finally landed it, after several unsuccessful attempts that involved, among other things, restoring robots, the glass in the frame was so thick with years of collected nicotine that I had to scrape at it for hours with a razor blade. But it was worth it, for this frame contains several original model sheets of Betty, Bimbo, Popeye and Bluto, and some amazing pencil drawings too. Here are Betty's costume designs, front and back, before and after in "Poor Cinderella", and the master art for Betty's definitive publicity pose.

But, by far, the most incredible item, in my opinion, is the animation drawing for Betty's iconic opening curtain scene. Of all the drawings that make up that sequence, this is the ultimate! Betty winks for only a split second, and this drawing captures it. It is a drawing of great complexity. Every image on the moving curtain was animated separately, a monumental feat in 1933; computer animation could do it easily, today.



Going back downstairs, I also noticed this beautiful Betty Boop candy Box, The cover is printed in iridescent silver ink. Although, I pass this every day, It's set high atop a showcase, and I must confess, I totally forgot that it was there. That is the price one pays for having too many things; they become part of the wallpaper.



One more Betty Boop item that really should be included here is this big beautiful boudoir doll. She is included in a large showcase downstairs, so we will, no doubt, be seeing her again. She is made of a sateen surfaced fabric that is also laminated to her molded face. She definitely comes from an era when Comic Characters were not just for children. This elegant doll was, quite possibly, designed to languish on a fashionable lady's bed.



Writing this, just now, I suddenly remembered another Betty, seriously in need of TLC. She has been sleeping in a cardboard box in the cupboard for many years. I simply never found the time, materials, and energy it would require to restore her. But she is a true rarity. I wonder if I could convince her to pose for a picture? As I recall, her face was perfect, but, alas, her silk body is beyond saving. It is totally disintegrating.

Yes! Oh yes! Here is the result: The Betty Boop Purse. I managed to position her so the missing fabric, especially on her chest, doesn't show too much. Her back view is more presentable. The purse body opens with a zipper, and there is a velvet handle on her back for carrying. Two of these Betty purses can be seen in the photograph of "Manne's Toyland".



And last of all, is this beautifully framed Spanish Chocolate label. How sweet it is! It was a gift from my good friend and "Outer Space Men" business partner, Gary Schaeffer.



And that's all, for now, until Betty shows up in some other showcases, later. Meanwhile, I'm adding a long footnote that continues the story of Kenny Kneitel, and How King Features made millions on Betty Boop, thanks to a blunder by my former employer, Harry Kislevitz. For those who wish to skip this, you can click [HERE](#) and Continue to BONZO, or continue to read, below:

Kenny and his good friend Richard Merkin had gone to school together at The Rhode Island School of Design. After graduation, Richard continued there as a teacher, and became a successful painter, while Kenny opened his store, Fandango, in Manhattan. This is where we met. The stuff he sold there was select and sophisticated, too quirky and esoteric to be a wild success. Thus, Kenny didn't have an easy time covering the rent. Eventually, he closed the store, and sold the inventory to either Andy Warhol or Peter Max. I can't remember which. Shortly after that, Peter Max hired Kenny as a designer. Peter had a filing cabinet full of his key design elements, and Kenny became one of a group of artists who adapted Peters imagery to merchandise. This was a perfect job for him, as he never claimed to be adept at drawing, but was a great designer, and excelled at typography, and conjuring up concepts.

After a few years with Peter Max, Kenny went to work for the great airbrush virtuoso Charles White III. The studio was right across the street from my loft on 16th Street, where the Outer Space Men were were created. Kenny was so good, conceptually, that, eventually, he planned and sketched out almost all of "Charlie's art", beforehand, and Charlie, merely airbrushed it in.

By this time, I was totally committed to working with Colorforms. The Outer space Men had come and gone, and I was living in the country, and working on Mickey Mouse Colorforms.

Harry Kislevitz had a trait that was sometimes flattering, sometimes annoying. He wanted to sample everything life had to offer, especially if it was on another person's plate, and that other person was obviously enjoying it. So if someone had "their own thing", Harry always wanted to taste some too. I'm speaking, of course, figuratively. He saw my obsession with collecting comic characters and wanted to try collecting them as well. So, when I came across duplicates of items in my collection, I began picking them up for him. I did this, solely as a favor, and I arranged for him to pay the seller directly, so no money had to pass through my hands.

But that wasn't enough for Harry, he decided he wanted "his own thing" too! I had Mickey Mouse, what would "his thing" be? Meanwhile, I had shared with him my enthusiasm for Betty Boop. And to introduce him to her I gave him him one of my 16 mm cartoons, "The Busy Bee". That is the one, in which Betty is a waitress in a diner. It was the only Betty Boop film he had ever seen.

Meanwhile, I had begun advertising in a monthly antiques newspaper called the Collectors News, for "Anything Betty Boop", and was beginning to acquire a few things. I also got more Cameo dolls, and, passed one on to Harry in a trade. The fact was, compared to Mickey, there just wasn't that much Betty Boop stuff made. Ironically, because of Harry, there are thousands of Betty Boop items made, today!

Suddenly he decided that "Mel has Mickey Mouse", so Betty Boop would be "his thing." And he hired a couple of doll ladies to create a Betty Boop doll, without telling me. Surprise! What they came up with was a disaster. Now Harry did a turnabout and came to me, asking for help. Eager to do anything for a royalty, I taught myself to sew, just enough to fake out a doll. I was trying to achieve a classic rag doll look, like Raggedy Ann. Then I made the master patterns, and designed the packaging, which, unlike the doll, itself, was great. It was based on scraps of imagery I had uncovered in archived issues of of 1930s Playthings Magazines. Then we had way too much fabric silk-screened (I still have a lot of these) and Harry hired my next door neighbor Hazel Lapore, who was adept at sewing for the Annual Church Bizarre, to sew up several dozen samples, in three sizes. Only the medium size was ever made. But packages were printed and die-cut for all three.



Now came a turning point in the history of Betty Boop. Harry was not secure in producing the doll without the proper legal rights. And not having the slightest idea who owned Betty Boop, he asked King Features, from whom he had licensed Popeye, for advice. Meanwhile, I had no idea this was going on. When I finally learned of it, I informed Harry that my friend Kenny, his mother, and the Fleischer family owned the rights, and he should license it from them. Unfortunately, it was already too late!

In the 1930s, King Features briefly produced a Betty Boop comic strip, which was short lived. The strip was awful, and Betty was already past her prime, at the time. Naturally, King Features had licensed Betty from "Fleischer Studios." Now, when Harry came to them with his inquiry, King Features claimed they owned the rights, based on the fact that they had done a comic strip. Therefore, Harry signed a licensing deal with them. Perhaps, King Features thought that "Fleisher Studios" was dead. So, magically, the onetime licensee, now, became the licensor. And Harry was technically licensing King Features' comic strip, not Betty Boop, the property.

I believe the issue was eventually resolved when Kenny's mother spoke up. Kenny later told me that King Features became the administrator, and Kenny's family got half a royalty. Anyway, like the Wild Things dolls that followed later, Colorforms couldn't sell the Betty Boop doll. Apart from no one knowing who she was, toy wholesalers, called "jobbers" didn't see themselves buying anything but Colorforms Stick-On toys from Colorforms, a problem we continued to have, all along.

While working on the doll, I came up with another concept. Why not make a Betty Boop Baby doll and call her "Baby Boop"? The character did not exist in Betty's history, and had never been done before. It would represent Betty when she was a baby. There was one cartoon in which Betty hosted a baby show and I based the styling for "Baby Boop" on one of the babies in the movie. I actually projected the film on paper, stopped the projector and traced it off, I still have the original drawing.



Harry hired the same doll ladies to make the baby, as vinyl dolls were supposedly their forte. All they ended up doing was casting the actual Cameo Betty Boop Dolls head, and not adapting it to baby proportions, and attaching it to a vinyl baby body, with diaper like a beanbag bottom, I designed.

At this point in time, it looked like the Betty Boop doll had a future, so I was on a roll, and came up with a mechanism that would permit Betty Boop's eyes to roll, when her head was tilted, with the thought of making a Betty doll, like the Cameo original with this feature added. Harry hired a product development company to build a prototype of the head with moving eyes. Actually, I had forgotten all about this, until now, I think I know which drawer that prototype is in.

When the rag doll proved to be impossible to sell, all of these ideas were abandoned. Meanwhile, Harry already had a Betty Boop Colorforms Dress-Up Set in the works. At my urging, he hired Kenny to design it. And so, it began, Betty had taken her first faltering steps on the way to becoming popular again, with King Features on the receiving end of what would become millions, all thanks to a twist of Fate and Harry Kislevitz. He tossed Betty Boop right into King Feature's lap and they picked her up and ran.

Eventually "Baby Boop", became a reality, too. I guess somebody had the same obvious idea I did. My Baby Boop never saw the light of day, but a hundred prototypes were made, with diapers sewn by my neighbor again, and King Features, who now had to approve, "everything" (what a laugh!) most certainly, saw that. Here is one of the samples, along with the proposed mock up for the package.



Thus, of all the tens of thousands of "new" Betty Boop products in the marketplace, today, these were the first. Although, this all took place 45 years ago, the dolls still look too up to date to convey their age. And half a century seems like yesterday.

BONZO

When I started collecting Bonzo, I had no idea who he was. To me, he was just a stray pup, who seemed to follow me home from flea markets and shows, because, like everything in this collection, I just liked the way he looked. And for the most part, I was the only one paying attention to him, early on, so naturally, many a homeless Bonzo found his way to me. It is ironic, that a character who is essentially British, should find himself so thoroughly collected by someone in the USA. Over the years, I have corresponded with other Bonzo collectors, who are much more enthusiastic, immersed, and well-versed in the art of George Studdy than I will ever be. As might be expected, all of them, either come from, or live in England.

I had already acquired a kennel full of Bonzos, before I became interested in who his master was. Learning of George Studdy, and seeing examples of his work, was a revelation to me. I had never realized that Bonzo actually preceded Mickey, and in his heyday was, perhaps, as popular in England as Mickey was in the USA. Nor could I guess, from seeing just the toys, that Studdy was a such a Fantastic artist. Many Bonzo fans are more interested in the graphics than the stray products Bonzo sired. Collecting just the beautifully drawn Bonzo postcards, with their consistently appealing imagery is, in itself, a hobby, one that was too far afield for me. I concentrated on the objects, the toys, and dolls, and knickknacks, along with some of the games.

As English toy dealers started attending shows and events in the USA, they brought many Bonzo treasures with them, inevitably, their best things. And, more often than not, the man waiting to welcome them, and give them a good home, was me. Bonzo had some American Adventures, in his day, but the products he generated here were few. Two dolls made in America come to mind, a fabulous one by Schoenhut and a large imposing image by Cameo.



The main Bonzo showcase, above, is on the big wall downstairs. It is dominated by the Cameo doll in the center, with both variations of the fabulous German Animated Walking Bonzo, on the left. These toys are very similar to the Distler Walking Mickey. One is officially licensed "Bonzo". The other, with slightly different ears and spots, is not. On the right side, is the beautiful Artisco Bonzo



Here is an extraordinary item, a velvet Bonzo Compact. According to the late great doll expert, Richard Wright, this was manufactured by Schuco. A quick check on the internet, just now, shows two compacts of identical construction, a turtle and a cat, and also a series of bear compacts, all attributed to Schuco. I believe Richard was right!



There is another great Bonzo item that will appear elsewhere, but Bonzo fans might never get there, so I will post a glimpse of it, here. This is a charming Bonzo Orchestra made in Italy, most likely by "Mina" of Torino. Twelve tiny wood jointed figures held together by elastic. I got this at Atlantic City. So sweet! A once in a lifetime find, complete.



The plaster statue of Bonzo on the left, is about as iconic an image of Bonzo as one can get. It appears to have been produced in conjunction with his appearances in the "Sketch." Around the base it reads, "BONZO of The SKETCH SENDS HIS BEST WISHES". On the back, it is "signed" "G. E. STUDDY." This is an early piece, rendered in Studdy's more realistic doggy style. Later on, Bonzo took on a rounder cuter more comic look. There is very subtle toning and tinting on the figure. It has been suggested that this might be a bookend. I tend to question that, as the side view reveals that the the 90 degree perpendicular, required to hold a book upright, is not flat.



The wood carving, on the right, is a mystery. Clearly, it is modeled after the plaster icon, on the left. Its purpose, this time, might have been to act as a bookend, as the back is perfectly flat. And, also, he is sitting on a book! Could that be a hint? Duh! So, I would dare say, at least, one more of these exists. But it wouldn't surprise me if there are many. I have no idea of its age. I purchased it on eBay, ten years ago, fully expecting that more would follow, but I never saw another. The carving is as adept, as if it might be the product of a cottage industry, in some country where woodcarving is commonplace. It is made entirely by hand, with no evidence that any power tools were used. Old or new, it is a stunning image with great charisma and presence.

Here is an interesting Spanish card game. It appears to be a form of dominos. I really like objects in which divergent characters cross the licensing lines, and appear together in "illegal" merchandise. Here we see Bonzo and Felix together, and each remains in character. Which reminds me; there is a fabulous figural vase in one of the Felix cases that represents Felix and Bonzo embracing (They might be dancing?). The flowers are held in their upturned mouths. I'll point it out when we get there.



Now, forward to the Desktop Tower. We'll find more Bonzos there.

THE DESKTOP TOWER

Even before the wall downstairs was full to overflowing, showcases began to appear upstairs. Soon, there was no place for anything “New” to go, but up here. This three tiered tower sits right next to my workspace, where I can see it every day, because it holds so many favorite things. Jumping to this showcase from Bonzo is an example of how difficult organizing this task is going to be. The three compartments hold a little bit of everything, including some Bonzo treasures that are extraordinary.



You might also notice the Fabulous Bumstead family marionettes. Their purpose and origin are a mystery, but they are clearly “professional”. My friend Noel Barrett discovered them at Renningers, over thirty years ago, and traded them to me for a giant walking Felix figure from Felix Chevrolet in L.A. They have been hanging around here for 30 years, now, and I never tire of seeing them. Daisy, also, never tires of looking through the glass at Bonzo.

Two favorite objects that I will mention now, solely, because they are only visible from this angle, are the only bisque Brownie I was able to find, the “Dude” from a series that always eluded me, and a curious anthropomorphic hot water bottle, in the center, made by Schafer Vater.



And last of all, I have to mention a favorite, the small cute sleeping Bonzo, carved out of wood, and lying right in front, beneath the wheels of ...



The the Steiff pull-toy of Barney Google and Spark Plug. This rare object took my breath away (and a big hunk of my money) when I finally saw it in reality.

Among the other favorite things, included here, are the only known (by me) example of the Betty Boop Hula dancer wind-up toy, in her original box, with a "Fleischer Studios" copyright, a small Deans Rag Book Oswald doll, and three extraordinary incarnations of KoKo the Clown. In the back, is the Schoenhut KoKo, which is jointed differently than any other figure that they made. In the center, is an exquisite KoKo doll. His delicate face is some form of composition, and his body is made of felt. And last of all, off to the left, is a KoKo windup toy. His label reads, "INKWELL CLOWN" by "Out of the Inkwell Films Inc." Another rarity is a curious "Henry" doll, made by Deans, with a head made of rubber that, so far, has survived.



There are a few delightful Bonzos on the top shelf, as well. Hiding in the back is a Deans velvet Bonzo doll that is absolutely huge. And right up front, is the most charming Chad Valley velvet Bonzo with a molded velvet face. Next to him is the animated barking Bonzo paper toy from Germany. Hiding behind them, is Bonzo's cat friend "Ooloo". In the center back is a large Felix doll with pressed molded face, and one of the two variations of the seemingly rare Deans Rag Book Felix dolls. This one is mohair plush; the velvet version is on the shelf below. These are the only two Deans Felix dolls I've ever encountered.

Right now, were standing on the sink, looking at the highest case. Before we move down to the middle one, just for a moment ,and just for the fun of it, lets look down! Wow! This dizzying view is one that no one, including myself, has ever seen before, till now.





There are so many treasures here! They include: numerous wood Mickey dolls from Italy and Germany, a box of 6 Mickey figures, made in France with their original box and advertising card, as well as, the straw packing, intact, a curious Mickey doll with glass eyes from England, a condiment set with a Mickey pot, and two Felix salt and pepper shakers, hanging off his arms, a Schuco Felix perfume bottle doll, half hidden beside a black and white Mickey perfume atomizer, Mickey Mouse razor blades, and Mickey Mouse phonograph needles, in the tin box marked "Noris", on the left. On the back wall, out of sight, is an ad for Felix Fly Paper, and the Deans Rag Book velvet Felix doll. There is also a fabulous Scrappy doll, a Popeye skiing toy, the Andy Gump movie toy, a German animated tin Felix toy, and two English celluloid figures of Mickey's nephews. Well, you can see there are a lot of things, too many to name, as well as many others, hiding from the camera's view.



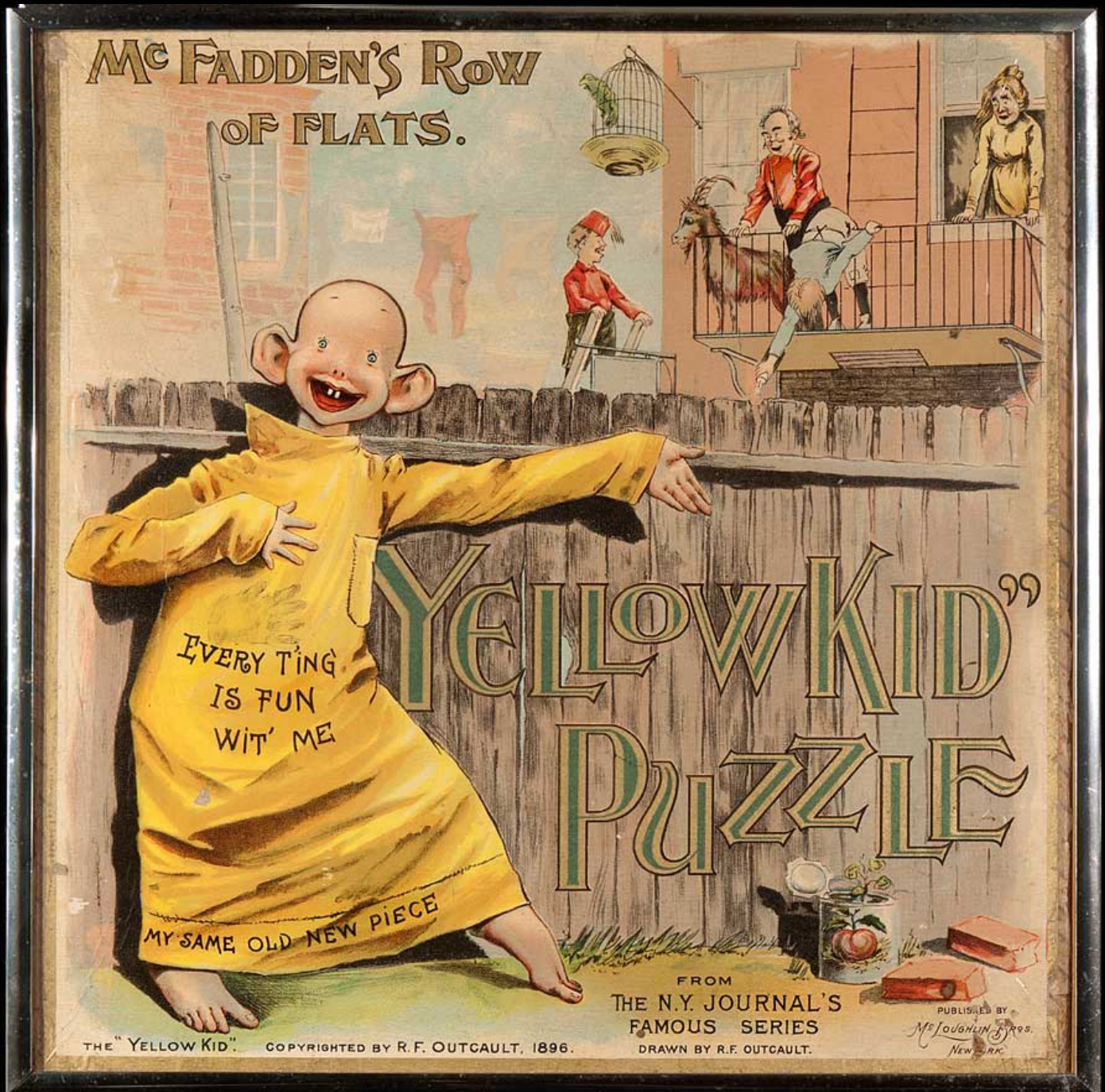
Here also are two Spanish Betty Boop dolls made of felt, and another Betty made of clay, also from Spain. And on the left side of the dolls, peeking out from behind, is a cardboard jointed Betty Boop toy that is difficult to find. The Mickey and Minnie, hanging, with rubber arms and legs were made in France.



Here, from a different angle, is the eyelevel showcase that I see most often, every day. This view barely discloses two matching Felix figurines, impossible to see. One is a candleholder. It holds a celluloid Felix baby rattle with a crazy drawing of Felix on it that resembles a monkey. And, although, this is clearly a manufactured item, the image of Felix was not printed, but was painted on by hand. There is also a Mickey Mouse composition pencil box, and a celluloid Bonzo wearing a felt fez and feeding a bottle to a tiny baby Bonzo he cradles in his paw. Up front, is a small wood jointed Felix on a scooter that was actually a playing piece in a game. This angle also offers a side view of the Mickey Mouse bank number three. His head is surprisingly round and deep, and his nose was manufactured as a separate piece.

THE YELLOW KID

In 1894, on the lower east Side of New York City, both, my father and the "Yellow Kid" were born. My father, Samuel, was the second of 13 children. The Yellow Kid, on the other hand, was the first of a hundred thousand siblings, who followed in his barefoot footsteps to populate the pages of the funny papers and comic strips of this Great Nation, and, indeed, the World. As most historians will tell you, it was thanks to him, the Yellow Kid that the newspaper comic strip and Comic Characters began.



Hogan's Alley, be it real or fictional, was just around the corner from Delancy Street, where my Grandparents, Maurice and Tillie lived. My father never spoke of his youth, in NYC, with the exception of one story, which I heard, time and again. Whenever I asked for pocket money, he would, inevitably, hand me some, but not without reminding me that he "had to sell newspapers on the streets of New York City, when he was only four years old." Could it be that the newspapers he was peddling featured the Yellow Kid?

THE YELLOW KID[®] COPYRIGHTED BY R.F. OUTCAULT, 1896.

FROM
THE N.Y. JOURNAL'S
FAMOUS SERIES
DRAWN BY R.F. OUTCAULT.

PUBLISHED BY
McClure, Phillips & Co.
New York

The Yellow Kid's Yellow nightshirt, on which words were written, was the beginning of the "talk balloon". Outcault, eventually, developed talk balloons, that more resembled those we know, today, clouds of speech emitted from the character's mouths.

The Yellow Kid's popularity led to his image being used on countless articles of merchandise, everything from toys and games to cigars, chewing gum, sheet music and whisky. These items appeared in the New York area, only, and for a relatively short period of time, which makes them extremely rare and hard to find today.

My father's story always seemed like a Tall Tale to me, but I figured if Davey Crockett could kill him a "bar" when he was only four, then Sam Birnkrant could sell the "New York Journal American" or the "World" on the sidewalks of New York when he was four years old, as well. On the other hand, his story was not nearly as hard to believe as the fact that I nearly didn't collect the Yellow Kid.

When I began collecting Comic Characters, Yellow Kid pin back buttons were everywhere. It seemed like I could have easily amassed several sets, but I found them repetitious and uninteresting, and buttons never were my thing. As I used to say, "Just a picture of something on something doesn't interest me. I liked objects that one could touch and see in 3D." Occasionally, a Yellow Kid figure would fall into my lap, and I would lap it up. Then, I stopped collecting the Yellow Kid. It was my friend Noel Barrett who I could thank for that! And it was also Noel who I can thank for the fact that after a hiatus of several years, I started collecting him again.

Beginning in the early days, when Comic Character Collecting, was new, Noel and I did all the shows together, sharing booths, hotel rooms, and good times, at every Brimfield, Renninger's Extravaganza, Kennedy Toy Show, and Atlantic City Show, for nearly 30 years. Noel was at these events in a dual capacity, both as a toy dealer and a toy collector. His first order of business was, by necessity, to make a living. I, on the other hand, was the

Noel had a customer in Texas, who was nuts about the Yellow kid.. Thus, if Noel found anything that he could sell this guy, it would absolutely make his trip. So, with that in mind, I stepped aside, when it came to Yellow Kid, and I would even help Noel find things to sell his customer. Once, I bought a fabulous bound volume of all the Yellow Kid Magazines, for only \$50. I passed it on to Noel, and we shared the profits, which were big! Many a time, at my house, after the show, Noel would pile his Yellow Kid haul on my desk and I would "spruce it up" for him, before he shipped it off to Texas! The fact is, I could have owned that guy's whole collection, before it ever got to him, if I had kept the stuff I found myself, and paid Noel Texas prices for the rest.

One day, several "Yellow Kidless" years later, in our hotel room on the eve of a Kennedy Toy Show, Noel reached into his luggage and pulled out a fabulous Yellow Kid Candy Container. His tone, as he showed it to me, was one of Shock and Incredulity! He had sent this handsome object to Texas, and the guy had sent it back again, saying that he "Didn't like it!" What? You've got to be kidding me! Noel speculated that his prize customer had figured out that he had been in heated competition, and paying competitive prices, when there was, actually, no competition. In other words, it dawned on him that he was the only player in the game.

"That's exactly the game I like to play!" said I. "I'll buy it!"

Noel's star customer had realized that he was, not only, living in the Lone Star State, he was, also, the Lone Yellow Kid Collector! And he needed to think someone else wanted his stuff, in order to be hot for it, himself. I can't remember the fellow's name, but, from that day forward, as my mother used to say, "His goose was Cooked!"

And so, I bought the candy container, and got a head start on collecting the Yellow Kid again. From Noel's point of view Texas had moved to New York State. We had met the "New" Yellow Kid Collector, and he was me! Here is the candy container below; this fabulous head of the Yellow Kid with a trap door in the bottom and blue glass eyes. I'm still trying to decide: What's not to like?



Thus, my Yellow Kid collection is a modest one, compared to what it could have been. Ironically, the man in Texas unloaded his whole collection, with the help of "Richard Olson", who is the ultimate expert on the Yellow Kid. Rich is the president and founder of "The R. F. Outcault Society." So, ironically, in the end, many of the things that once sat on my desk, came back again, and as an extra dividend, I made a new and lasting friend, Rich Olson.

And so, the question is: Where to begin? These things all fit pretty nicely on one shelf, and I could easily click a photo of it all, from a distance, as I have done so many times over the past few weeks of taking photos. But the thing I love most about these Yellow Kid objects is the dazzling impact of the color Yellow, when one moves in closer, and lets it fill your field of vision. Together, they radiate a distinctive yellow glow. So here is a group of favorite things, up close! Looking at the photo, now, I am questioning why is that piece of cardboard there? It is obscuring one of my all-time favorite Yellow Kids. I have no appetite to shoot this over. I'll just pull him out, and take a photo of him on his own.



What you see, here, is pretty much self-explanatory, a plaster bust, a milk glass bottle, painted yellow with frosted head, a gorgeous statue, and the iconic art on which it's based, a jointed doll, and next to him a cast metal hat-tipping toy, wearing its original yellow dress with the writing still intact and legible. Finding Yellow Kids, with the century eold fabric still there, is rare.

In the back row, is the Yellow Kid cigar box with its beautifully graphic label that portrays the Yellow Kid, whose name, by the way, is "Mickey Dugan", blowing smoke out of his ears, and the small and generally known version of the fabric doll. And then..... I'll take a better photo of this totally outrageous object, in which, when a crank is turned, the Yellow Kid swallows cigarettes!



Moving over to the left, we see a larger version of the fabric doll that has caused every collector who has seen this to express surprise that it exists. Below that, are two mechanical Yellow Kids, a bell ringer and a hat tipper. Here, also, is a fragment of a piece of wood beautifully painted as the Yellow Kid. This was the first image of him I ever saw. I acquired it half a century ago, with no idea who he was. Next to him is a vintage greeting card, on which his face appears, and last of all, an outrageous doll with a body covered in bright yellow rabbit fur.



In the center of this long showcase, is the paper on wood Yellow Kid Theatre, the only one I ever had a chance to get that was all original, including the top curtain, which has always been missing, even as a Xerox copy on the few I've seen. In front of that, is the Yellow Kid paper weight, and two bars of figural soap in their original boxes. Both boxes have the original paper brochures inside. and the writing on his nightshirt, both on the soap and the box lids is different on each one. Here, too, is what appears to be a Yellow Kid ventriloquist doll. It has a moving jaw. Last of all, is a preciously delicate tiny doll in a dress of yellow crepe paper. Sharing center stage, as well, are an exquisite pair of German bisque figures of Mutt and Jeff with moveable arms, they are 4 and 5 inches tall, and a small bisque figure of Uncle Sam, riding on a bull. If you're wondering what they're doing in the Yellow Kid showcase, the answer is: lack of space!



On the far right of the long showase is a blast of yellow: The Yellow Kid Ten Pins. This set has a dazzling presence to it. At first glance, all ten ten pins look identical, but the fact is, each has a different bowling related saying on his gown. The main figure takes a slightly different pose, pointing out that he's "De King Pin - See!" On his head he wears a crown. On the left is another delicate doll, and on the right, are two telescoping scissor toys that grow to three feet tall.



Now that you have seen close ups, the complete case, below, looks small. That is a problem I have experienced throughout the process of taking these photographs. I've tried to strike a happy medium, so these images will be large enough to still have impact on a larger monitor, and small enough to be seen on smaller screens, as well. Beyond the confines of this showcase, a few other Yellow Kid items have leaked out, and are scattered around the house.

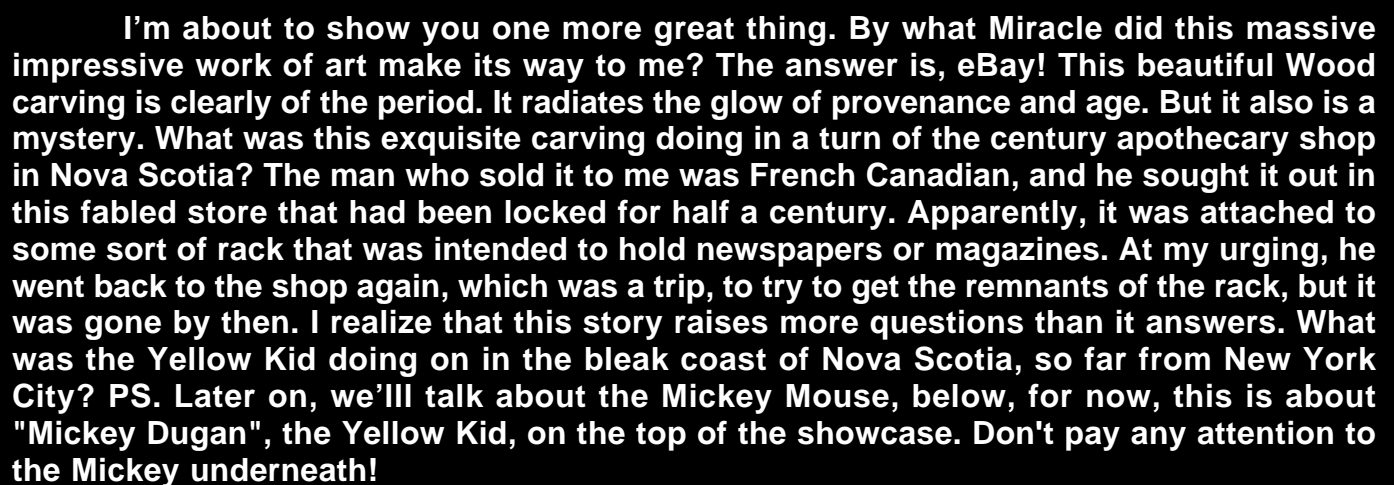


One of those is the fabled Yellow Kid Cigar Cutter. This was originally Noel's pride and joy. He sold it to the guy in Texas, and Rich Olson got it back for me. The condition really isn't bad, considering. By the way, I would never consider touching up a rarity like this. Nor, for that matter, have I seen the need to do any restoration on any of the Yellow Kids. The very fact that they have survived, is, in itself, a Miracle.



This website is coming to you in real time. I'm really working it out as we go along. What? You're not surprised! Ha! It was just too complicated to figure it out, ahead of time. Anyway, there was one issue, on which I really couldn't make up my mind. Should I attempt to isolate the various showcases from their environment as on Charles Ponstingl's site? Or should I show them in their actual surroundings? Taking photographs, over the past few days, I tried it both ways. So the question is, should I show you the Yellow Kid showcase, with all the stuff that sits in front of it removed, as I have, more or less, attempted on this page, so far? Or should I show it the way it would really look, if you were actually here, with all the stuff that sits in front of it every day, still there?

Well, the fact is, it's all great stuff, and there will be no record or memory of it if I don't show it some way. Everything is mixed together, but, on the other hand, in my eyes, it all goes together, and I like it that way. When one sees so many similar things, they become repetitious. Therefore, I often take great visual delight in the way dissimilar objects relate. I guess I'm slowly realizing that there is no way I can make an honest accurate record of this collection, without revealing the environment. So with that in mind, here is what the Yellow Kid department looks like, at any given time.





I bought this carving based on photographs, and intuition. Intuition, by the way, rarely fails me. I've found it to be more perceptive and reliable (and plentiful) than brains. But, I must admit, while waiting for this object to arrive, some questions troubled me. One look, set my mind at ease. Whether or not the story held water, really didn't matter. To see this awesome wood carving, in person, to hold it in your hands, and peer into its hollow interior, marvel at its form and construction, and realize, first hand, that its age and patina is perfection, leaves the viewer with no option, other than to instantly suspend all disbelief.



BUSTER BROWN

Buster Brown's name and face survived for over a hundred years, by hiding in ten million pairs of shoes! His familiar slogan, preceded by a bark or two, "That's my dog Tige, he lives in a shoe! I'm Buster Brown, look for me in there, too!" echoed in my ears, throughout my childhood years. In all those shoes, for all those years, his familiar face remained, essentially unchanged. The visage is that of a handsome lad with a look that seems angelic. But a mischievous wink reveals his true nature, that of a prankster, and all round trouble maker. Beside him, is his familiar, a pit bull terrier, "Tige", with a grin that is both diabolical and friendly. That's about it, what Buster Brown is all about, summed up in a single picture



Apart from living in the shoes of a million children, there was an awful TV show, a leftover from radio, called "Buster Brown's Gang". Named after its sponsor, the show had nothing to do with Buster Brown, other than the fact that it was paid for by his shoes. It featured a fat jovial host, "Smilin' Ed McConnell" who was replaced, after he died by "Andy (less than) Divine". "Froggy the Gremlin", played by a vinyl squeeze toy, appeared in a blast of talcum powder smoke each week, and wiggled, atop a grandfather's clock, threatening to "plunk his magic twanger" at "Squeaky" the mouse, who was actually a live hamster, held captive, from the neck down, in a human body suit, and "Midnight", a really creepy dead black cat, who was more representative of taxidermy than puppetry. And that was that! Who knew?

Who knew that Buster Brown was once a hugely popular comic strip, the worlds first comic mega hit! It was the work of R. F. Outcault, once again, following the Yellow Kid, and even more successful. No longer limited to the New York area, as the Yellow Kid had been, Buster's fame was international. .

After the Yellow Kid, Outcault created and drew a panel comic strip called "Pore Lil Mose" for the next two years. It featured America's first black comic hero, Pore Lil Mose, a seven year old black boy, living in New York City with: a cat, a monkey, a dog, and a bear named, Billy. Each weekly panel took the form of letters written by Mose to his Mammy, back home in Cottonville Ga. The strip was beautifully drawn, and the characters were spot on. Outcault was an excellent draftsman, his artwork was superior to all the other comic artists of the day, with, perhaps, the sole exception of the great Winsor McCay. The social Commentary of Pore Lil Mose was timely, and, although, the attitude it conveyed was dignified and kindly, it was of the era, and could not exist, today. Like Brer Rabbit, and Huckleberry Finn, it's gone with the wind, and the likes of it can never return again.

PORE LIL MOSE

HIS LETTERS to his MAMMY



R.F. Outcault

New York
 Dear Mammy
 I thank you for sending
 back my letters; I have had
 them bound in a book
 and take pleasure
 in sending you
 here-with a copy
 for your self.
 Lovingly Your Son
 Pore lil Mose

Mrs Pryor
 Cottonville La



In 1902, Outcault created Buster Brown. He was a runaway success. Thus, two months later, Pore Lil Mose came to an end. As one commentator said, he went into the dustbin of history. Unlike the Yellow Kid, who was a poor street urchin, and not particularly good looking, Buster Brown was downright pretty, the pampered child of wealthy parents. But his looks belied his naughty nature. His sidekick, Tige, which was short for Tiger, was modeled after Outcault's own pet. He was sometimes Buster's partner in crime, and at other times, his conscience. Tige is credited with being the first talking animal in the comics. Some have conjectured that the name "Buster" was inspired by "Buster Keaton" who was a popular kid star of vaudeville, at the time.

In 1904 The Brown Shoe Company licensed Buster Brown. It seemed a fitting match, in as much as they both, by chance, shared the same last name. As an advertising campaign, the company hired an army of midgets to tour the country, impersonating Buster Brown to promote their product, Buster Brown Shoes. They also created a girl's shoe, based on Buster's girlfriend, Mary Jane. Both names and shoes remain in use today. If not for that commercial tie in, the name Buster Brown might have followed Pore Lil Mose, into oblivion.



Here is a window back in time, showing "The only Original" Buster Brown, at one of the the Brown Shoe Company's Events. This one took place in Grove City, PA. Could this be one of an "Army of Midgets," hired to impersonate Buster? Or is this really him, Buster Brown in person? He sure looks like the real thing to me! Tige also is convincing! I have no idea what the origin of this image might be. It is not an original photograph, but it is printed on old card stock, and is quite large, 12" X 18". It might have been created in the era, for display in shoe stores. Clearly It wasn't printed yesterday. I bought it at a show that, by the way, was in PA., over 40 years ago.



But, Buster Brown's Success wasn't only about shoes. In his heyday, Buster's likeness appeared on a multitude of items, from toys and games, and every kind of plaything, to socks, cigars and alcoholic drinks. Much of this merchandise, as you will see below, was quite beautiful. And some of it was intended to be Works of Art, even, back then. After all, the comic pages, in those days, were not just for kids.

BROWN'S
★5★
MARK
MEANS QUALITY

BUSTER BROWN BLUE RIBBON **SHOES**

The Brown Shoe Co. MAKERS, ST. LOUIS.

RESOLVED!
THAT THIS IS THE
BEST BUNCH OF
SONGS YOU EVER
HEARD
BUSTER BROWN

SONG SUCCESSES
FROM
BROADHURST & CURRIE'S
ELABORATE PRODUCTION OF
R.F. OUTCAULT'S
FAMOUS

BUSTER BROWN

Resolved	50
My Orange Blossom Loo	50
That's the Girl	50
Take a Little Stroll with Me	50
Oh, Gladys!	50
Ma Dinah Lee	50
Katrina	50
Scotland Beats Them All	50
That's What the Roses Will Tell You	50
Me No Sabbee	50
My Helter Skelter Girlie	50

I DIDN'T THINK
HE WAS SO FULL
OF MUSIC

M. WITMARK & SONS

R. F. Outcault

In 1905, Buster appeared on Broadway, in a musical extravaganza. The lead role of Buster Brown was played by a 21 year old midget, known as Master Gabriel. A few years later Master Gabriel would star again in a production of Winsor McCay's "Little Nemo."



Below, is the Buster Brown showcase. All my Buster stuff is, basically, in one place. I'll attempt to point out some of the items. Starting on the left, there are two Buster masks. The one on the top is high gloss, embossed and made in Germany. It advertises Buster Brown bread. The one below it, sells shoes. Next to these, is an amazing wind operated Animated Display. The Windmill that animates it is made of red and white striped celluloid. This is Green energy, circa 1910. On the back wall, is the Buster Paper doll. And on the side wall, is the Buster Brown Christmas puzzle box. Below that, is another variety of paper doll. And hanging from the top, is Buster, holding Tige. This early composition novelty is suspended on a spring. When it is bounced around, Buster lifts Tige up and down. This photo is also the only one that shows a bisque of Billy Bear. Can you find him? I'll describe the other things, when we get there.



Here is a painted tin Buster and Tige wind up, with an amazing amount of the original paint intact, as well as what might be the original ball. This is one of a series of similar looking tin toys that use the same two figures. When the toy rocks, Buster and Tige roll the ball back and forth. By the way, is it just me, or does Tige look like a monkey?



Here is the Buster Brown and Tige Schoenhut "Roly Dolly". This, might be the rarest and most desirable Buster Brown toy known, and one of the most aesthetically gratifying. It is a treasure, for which I can thank Noel. By the way, collectors, take note! There's a bogus version of this toy, out there, with a Tige that's genuine, a base that's too small, and a Buster that's completely false. I know the maker, a real faker!



This huge imposing Candy Container, featuring Buster Brown, riding on a rabbit is stunningly spectacular, especially, in person. These photos don't begin to convey its awesome size and presence. Its condition is amazing. Its form, magnificent!



Next to Buster, trampling on the Christmas Puzzle, is a considerably less attractive Tige. He, too, is a Candy Container, and has Glass eyes.



Here is a Buster Brown advertising watch in a rather nice original box, with a pair of German bisques, on either side. The animated post card, behind, was designed for the user to cut out and construct, himself. It's amazing that it has survived!



Below, is a painted tin Buster on the left, and a white glazed porcelain Buster with a counter weighted nodding head, on the right, made by Schafer Vater. In the middle, is what might be the most exquisite Buster Brown item of them all. This bronze sculpture, on a marble base, was created by the renowned Austrian sculptor, Carl Kauba. Kauba was born in Vienna in 1865. His intricate bronzes were imported to to the United States between 1895 and 1912. He visited America, around 1886, inspired by the culture of the American West, and traveled to the Western states, where he made sketches and models of native Americans and Cowboys. Nonetheless, all his bronzes were made and cast in Austria.

This sculpture of Buster Brown was an unexplained departure for Kauba. Nothing else in his body of work remotely resembles it. One of his specialties was polychroming. Therefore, this figure of Buster was produced in two versions, plain bronze as seen, below....



And a second version that is polychromed as seen in these three views. The color is extremely subtle, a slight tint of pink on Buster's clothes. The work is signed "C Kauba" and inscribed, "after R. F. Outcault"



Here is a curious game, The Buster Brown Hurdle Race. Although, it is signed R. F. Outcault, the draftsmanship does not appear to be his own. On the other hand, all the characters are there, including the Yellow Kid and Pore Lil Mose. What makes this game exciting to me, at least, is the fact that elements of it were printed in the most amazing gold metallic ink. When the box is tipped away from the light it appears quite dull and dingy. But when the light hits it, just right, the gold ink begins to glow as if it was applied yesterday. This is no ordinary gold paint. I would find it difficult to replicate with any metallic inks I know, today. It wouldn't surprise me if there is some element of real gold leaf involved, for the patina of age that has left its mark on every other aspect of the game has not altered the gold ink. It remains clean and unchanged, still glowing dramatically, even though, this toy was made at the Turn of the Century.



Last of all, here is, just about, my favorite Buster item. My tastes, perhaps, are simple. This uniquely trivial piece of Americana really speaks to me. Nobody would throw a Viennese Bronze away. But what are the chances that this fragile box, with all its uncut sheets intact, and an instruction sheet, printed on a thin piece of gossamer tissue paper, would survive, complete, in relatively pristine shape, after all this time.



Many years ago, when I found this treasure, I carefully carried it to the copy center, and had some Xerox copies made. Although, they are crude by today's inkjet standards, when cut out and constructed, the results are quite effective. And, thus, they serve as surrogates for the real thing, as they surround the Buster Brown showcase, in a Buster Brown Parade.



LITTLE NEMO

The World is just now rediscovering the Greatest Comic Artist of all time, Winsor McCay. There are not enough superlatives in the English language to describe the genius of this man. His draftsmanship was possibly the most articulate the World has ever seen. And his imagination knew no bounds. He used his amazing ability to draw realistically to create a surreal world of dreams where anything was possible, and everything was visual. Little Nemo was his Masterpiece. Nemo had been preceded by "Little Sammy Sneeze," and was followed by "Dreams of a Rarebit Fiend" All of these erased the barriers that separate reality from fantasy, and carry the viewer into a world of visual gymnastics, the likes of which had never before been seen.

The story line and characters of Little Nemo were quite unusual. Unlike the visual elements, which were years ahead of their time, the story was Turn of the Century. The dialogue was hard to read, and Nemo mumbled his way through his adventures, saying things, like "Huh?" and "Oh!" The five main characters were strange, as well. Apart from Nemo, a small boy often attired in pajamas, there was Flip, a clown with a green face and a cigar, Doctor Pill, another older man, the Princess, daughter of Morpheus the King of Sleep, and the subject of Nemo's quest. And, last of all, the Imp, a young native of Nemo's age. Often referred to as Impy, he is one reason that "Little Nemo in Slumberland" can never be revived again. Although, the Imp was a major character, loved and treated with respect, he was a racial stereotype, nonetheless, and today would be considered politically incorrect. In the recent Japanese animated feature, the Imp was written right out of the script, and replaced by a squirrel! Nuts? I kid you not!



As collectibles, toys and objects related to Nemo are the rarest of the rare. The showcase, below, contains nearly all the Little Nemo stuff that I was able to scrape up, over the course of 40 years. It is, nonetheless, more than even the most knowledgeable collectors, who have viewed it, have ever seen before. Many of these objects are only known examples. And, at the same time, they are a sort of a guide to guessing what else there must have been. Ironically, what is there tells a tale about what's not!

Clearly, there were two sizes of Schaffer Vater flasks. Four of the smaller set are above, and Dr. Pill, in the lower left hand corner, is from the larger one. I once saw a photo of the bigger Imp. It was IMPressive! Apart from the 5 bisques, the late doll expert, Richard Wright once told me that there was a larger set of bisques, with moveable heads that turned up in an auction catalogue, years ago, in Germany. He might have just been putting me on. The Fabulous Dr. Pill Roly Polly, in the back row, tells us that there must have been a set of five of those. It was sold to me as "Uncle Sam" by a self-important pompous ass, who proclaims himself an authority on toys. When I pointed out that he had just sold me Dr. Pill, he was ready to cut his throat! There is also one set of Little Nemo dolls known. I've often dreamt of finding those.

Apart from the things in the above case, I've have been fortunate enough to obtain a few other items. Here is a bell toy featuring Flip and Nemo. It still glows! Its durability enabled it to survive a hundred years.



This paper on wood Target Toy was manufactured by "Bliss". The idea was to throw small beanbags, and get them through the holes to score points. I guess I don't need to point out that this art was not drawn by McCay, himself. But it has a certain grotesque charm. And the joy I felt upon discovering it made the name Bliss seem apropos.



This set of 12 Valentine Post Cards were produced in England, in 1907 by Raphael Tuck, and Son, and printed in Germany. This artwork, too, was not created by McCay, but it is quite charming, anyway. The twelve cards can be arranged to tell a of story. They are adapted from panels in the original Sunday page.





*The Princess
asks in tender tone
That Nemo share with her the throne.*

*Valentine
Greetings*



*Valentine
Greetings*



*Good morning, prithree Princess fair.
Nemo's come your love to share.*

Valentine Greetings



*Go Nemo and
the Princess, too.
King Morpheus,
give your blessing, do!*

Valentine Greetings



*Dear Princess,
let the love-light on me beam,
Ere Flip awakes me
from this happy dream.*

Valentine Greetings



*I offer you my heart and hand,
Oh, Princess, sweet of Stumberland!*

Valentine Greetings



*Valentine
Greetings*

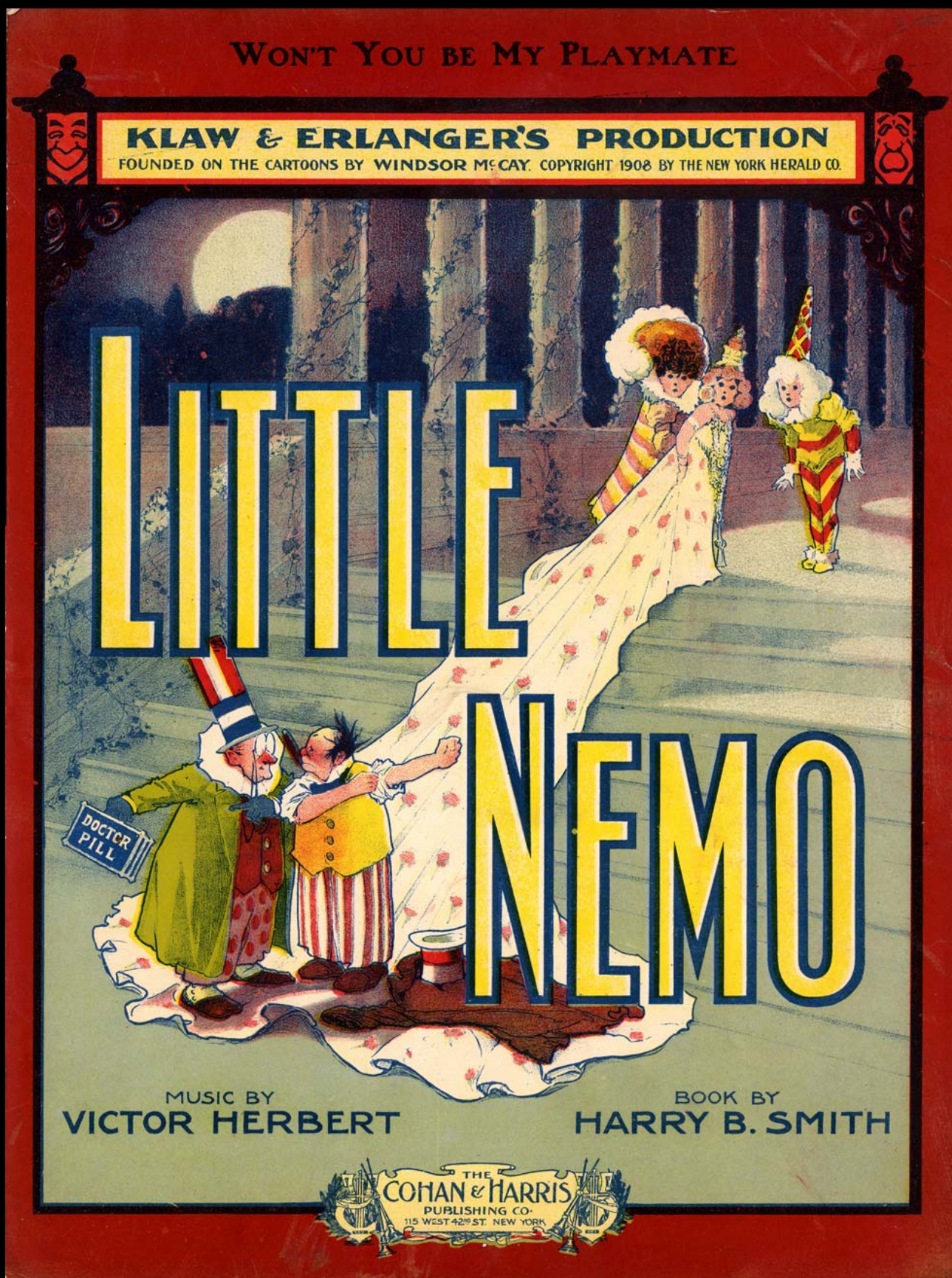
*The kingdom of thy heart,
I could reign o'er,
And there abide,
Princess, forevermore.*



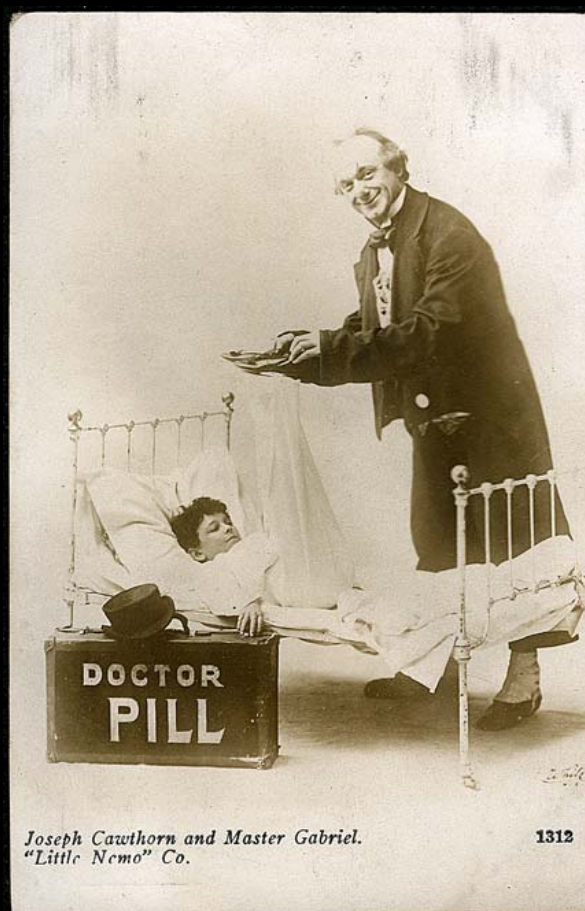
*Princess, if dreams come true,
Nemo would marry you!*

Valentine Greetings

The oversize sheet music, below, is from the Broadway production of Little Nemo. It opened in the New Amsterdam Theatre in October 1908 and starred Master Gabriel, the talented midget actor who previously played Buster Brown. Billed as an Operatic Fantasy, it featured music by Victor Herbert, the composer of "Babes in Toyland", and lyrics by Harry B. Smith. It ran for 111 performances. and closed in January 1909.



The four post cards, below, show Master Gabriel as little Nemo. The first is a printed card. The other three are actual photographs. Might I venture to suggest that Dr. Pill's hands-on bedside manner might not be well received today.



Sitting here at the computer, at this very moment, if I look up, above my desk, this is what I see, a glorious triptych, drawn by Winsor McCay, for the Winchester Stores. Three panel scenes, like these, were changed each month. They fit in special wooden frames, in the front window, and were sent out each month, twelve times a year to all the outlets in the Winchester chain. Much of the artwork was great. It often featured Comic Characters. Two of these spectacular displays were created by Winsor McCay. On the reverse side of one is a scene depicting "The Toonerville Folks" by Fontaine Fox. This photo shows what the Little Nemo panels look like in daylight. A time of day when they can only be photographed from this angle, because in daylight, the rafters and white ceiling reflect in the glass.



Here is the same art, as seen at night. This is the only light, in which the art can be photographed straight on. This is Winsor McCay at his most Spectacular.

AS THE WINCHESTER
STORE OF THIS COM-
MUNITY WE REPRESENT
THE NATIONAL CHAIN
OF 6300 INDIVIDUALLY
OWNED WINCHESTER
STORES.

**WE HAVE COMBINED
THE CHAIN STORE
BENEFITS OF NATIONAL
COOPERATIVE ACTION
WITH THE PERSONAL
SERVICE OF LOCAL
OWNERSHIP.**



Hardware prices are held down by the National Chain of **6,300** individually owned **WINCHESTER** stores



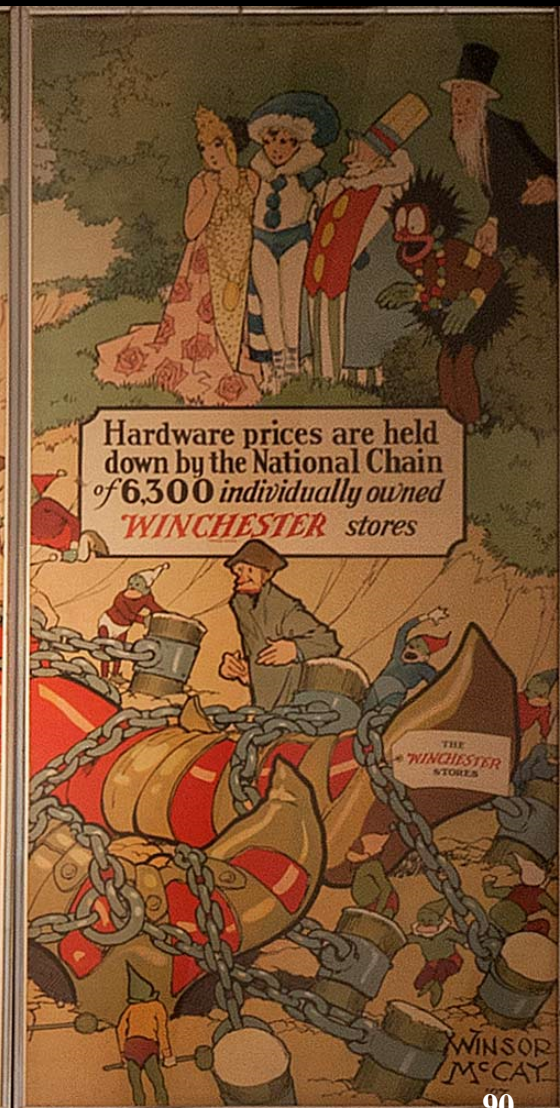
YOUR DOLLAR BUYS MORE
AT THE
WINCHESTER
STORE

IT WILL PAY YOU TO
TRADE HERE. WE ARE
THE EXCLUSIVE AGENTS
FOR THE WINCHESTER
LINE OF TOOLS, CUTLERY,
ATHLETIC GOODS, PAINTS
AND HOUSEHOLD HARD-
WARE. YOU CAN GET NO
BETTER VALUES FOR
YOUR MONEY.

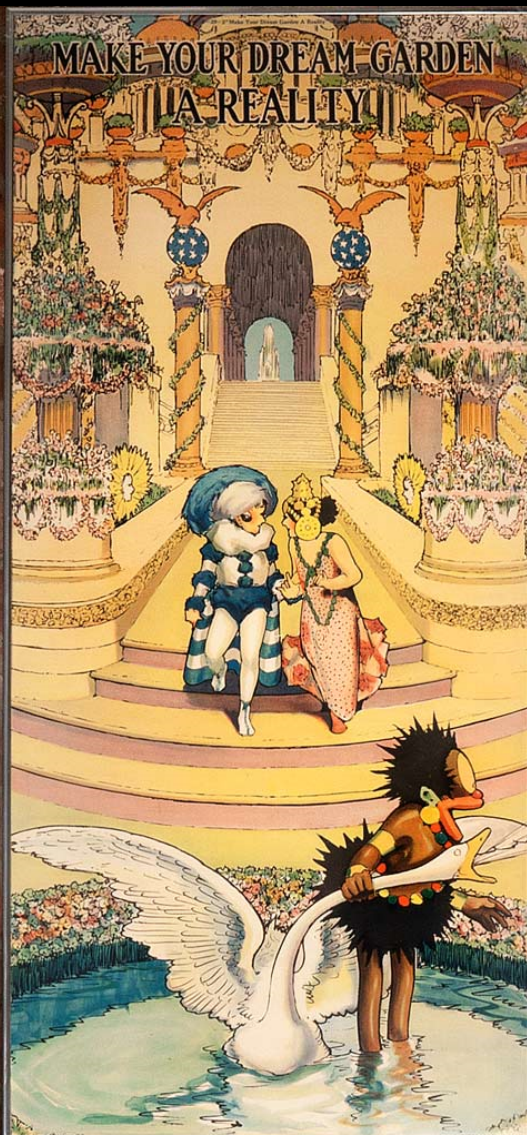
IN ADDITION TO WINCHESTER PRODUCTS WE MERCHANDISE A FULL LINE OF ALL YOUR HARDWARE NEEDS. WATCH FOR OUR NATION WIDE SALES AND MAKE YOUR DOLLAR GO FARTHER.



Hardware prices are held
down by the National Chain
of **6,300** individually owned
WINCHESTER stores



Looking to my left, while still sitting in the same place, I can see this. It is the companion piece to the art above. This wondrous scene takes place in a fantastic garden. It is advertising seeds.



Here is a French poster, advertising the Vitagraph Movie, "Little Nemo". In French, it's titled, "Winsor McCay the Last Cry in Animated Drawings". The film features 8 minutes of McCay, in person, wagering with some of his friends, including the comedian John Bunny, that he can make animated drawings come to life, by doing 4000 drawings in a month. There is some slapstick nonsense, involving a young man who accidentally mixes up the drawings. But, in the end, there is two minutes of glorious animation. The film was hand tinted by McCay, himself. This short movie is generally considered to be the first example of great animation, and the best there was, until Walt Disney.



[illegible]

GUS WHITE'S PUNCH & JUDY

The finest single acquisition in the Birnkrant Collection is "Gus White's Punch and Comic Family." For years, it has been my intention to create a website documenting and sharing this important National Treasure. To be permitted to be its custodian, if only temporarily, is an Honor and a responsibility. To do it justice in a website will be a major undertaking, and it is something I have contemplated doing for many years.



Sitting here this morning, wondering what character or category in the collection I should address next, I, just now, realized that it would be ridiculous to document this collection, without even mentioning Gus White's Punch, simply because I plan to do a bigger better website, dedicated to it, in the future. The clock is ticking faster these days, and I am moving slower. The only future may be present. I think I'd better include it here, at least for now, and do an entire website, later. I already have a bunch of pictures ready!

There is no need to rationalize Punch and Judy being part of a collection of Comic Characters. Going back several centuries, Punch and Judy were most definitely the First Comic Characters. Their look and styling is unique. It was chronicled quite beautifully, and, once and for all, definitively, by George Cruikshank in 1828.

The tradition traveled across the sea to The New World, where it continued, and realized its finest hour in the able hands of a talented young artist and sign painter, Clarence Augustus "Gus" White, born in 1859, in Goshen New York. Gus went to a Fair when he was 17 years old, and saw a Punch and Judy Show. He came away saying, "I can do better than that!" And proceeded to do so!



Young Gus carved the puppets out of wood, built a theatre, painted the scenery, and created "Gus White's Punch and Comic Family", working only from his memory of that show. For the next half century, Gus traveled with his one-man production, up and down the East Coast to places as far away as Boston, Cleveland, New York City and Canada. But he always returned to his home base of Goshen, where he practiced the trade of sign painting. When Punch and Judy's popularity waned, he painted signs, full time, until he died, at the age of 75, in 1934. Gus was buried in an unmarked pauper's grave, beneath a tree in the State Hill Cemetery in Goshen.

There was a fire, in 1905, in which some of the puppets were destroyed. But Gus was doing a show, elsewhere, at the time, and the stage and most of the cast of "Little People" survived. After Gus passed away, the stage and the remaining players were given to Gus's great nephew, Harold White, who loved and cared for them all his life. There is an ironic story that Harold tells. I have a video of him recounting it that will, eventually, be posted on the Gus White website. When Harold was 9 years old, Walt Disney visited Goshen. He saw the Punch and Judy show and offered young Harold a handsome price to buy the puppets, saying they were the finest Punch and Judy he had ever seen. Harold, emphatically, said, No!

In 1992, Harold White's health was not good. Therefore, he and his family put Punch and his Comic Family up for auction at the Mark Vail auction Gallery in Walden NY, hoping that his beloved "Little People" would find a good home. Their fear (and mine) was that a folk art dealer would purchase them, or worse still, a group of them would pool their resources, and divide up the show.

The auction took place on October 24, 1992 on a rainy night in Walden. I was determined to not go home without them. For days beforehand, Eunice and I had discussed how much we should bid. Each time, the sum grew higher. Sitting there, that night, we were getting more and more uptight. Folk art dealers were running, back and forth, to and from the telephone. Eunice was convinced that there were movie stars in the audience.

Mark Vail, himself, was the auctioneer. He gave Gus White's Punch the buildup it deserved. Mark had, in fact, done a job publicizing the auction that was nothing short of superb! Dammit! Now he stood on the stage and said, "This is the finest lot that I have ever had the honor of selling, and it will always be the finest one that I have ever sold." In our hearts, the entire audience knew that that was true. Eunice whispered in my ear, "Bid it all! Bid all the money that we have!" I put my hand up, and didn't take it down. The rest was all a blur. Finally, I heard Mark Vail say, "Put your hand down, Mel. You're bidding against yourself! It's yours!"

So, without further ado: Here is the curtain and the ticket booth, and three of the puppets. In the center, is Happy Hooligan. He joined the troupe in 1902, and thus the link with Comic Characters was made complete! A hundred years ago, Happy Hooligan was the latest Little Person to join Gus White's Comic Family. Ultimately, he was the last.



And here's the stage, and some of the main actors. Actually, this is only the proscenium, and one of the scenes, attached to a holder that I constructed for display. The actual stage with all its portable framework and complex paraphernalia, when assembled, stands ten feet tall and three feet deep. It is complete with all the other scenery and props, and everything, in two huge cases that resemble coffins, in size and shape.



The Stage is exactly as it looked in Gus's day, only less deep. The impressive fringe is all original. Starting on the left, is the Clown He was obviously patterned after America's most famous Clown, "Humpty Dumpty". He is the one puppet I have finished restoring. That is another story, to be told another day. Suffice it to say, I wouldn't dream of "fixing up" any remnant of the original clothing, no matter how worn out or moth eaten it was. Unfortunately, several years previously, Harold and his well-intentioned family decided to "spruce the puppets up". Thus, they redressed many of them with red and turquoise corduroy and other modern stuff, much of which was applied with airplane cement. Thank God, for acetone!

Miraculously, at the time, someone suggested that Punch's original coat should be saved, so it was placed in a brown paper bag, both halves. It had been cut into two pieces, haphazardly, up the back. I sewed it together again, and was able to detect the size and placement of every sequin. The ones that replace them are absolutely authentic, so are some remnants of the braid,

His hat, all except for the brim, which I had to make, was hiding under a new bright red one. So Punch is pretty much all original again, his pants are a total mess, but they are original, so they will stay unchanged. Therefore, rest assured all ye purists, who find the fact that I am “restoring” these puppets, disturbing. I’m not “restoring”, I’m merely un-sprucing! That's quite a different thing!

Believe me, I am a purist too. Every patch on the clowns patchwork clothes is a perfect match to the original, and all the fabrics used are 100 years old. Even the color of every stitch of the embroidery is correct, the original knots remained on the back for me to match. I bought a book to learn the stitch.

Next is the Baby who Punch immediately dispatches in the play, and then, is Judy. Her bonnet is only temporary; one day, I will recreate the original. And next is Punch, who, as I mentioned above, is about as restored as he will get. All those sequins are original hammered copper, plated in gold. They, too, are a hundred years old. Each is a perfect match and placement for those that were lost, even before the sprucing up. And next is the Devil. He can stick out his wooden tongue, and his neck operates like an accordion. It can extend, like a giraffe, although, when I got him it was stitched in place. Here, he is emerging from Punches’ lethal Sausage making machine, which was the fate of every character in the play. In Gus White's version, anyway. Each one was ground up to become personalized sausage links. The Chinaman’s links, for instance, had a pigtail on the end.





And last, is the Policeman. He was not in the auction. Harold brought him to me, afterwards. I believe both Harold and his wife Roberta were pleased as Punch that the Little People came to live, here, in Mouse Heaven.

One element that makes Gus White's vision of Punch unique, and uniquely American, is the fact that he transformed the classic characters of the traditional English Punch into American ethnic stereotypes: a Chinaman, an Irish Washerwoman, an Irish Cop, several Black Men, a Jew, a Drunkard, and among those that were lost in the fire was even one who resembled Uncle Sam. There are also a whole arsenal of weaponry and instruments of death. In the event you don't know the plot of Punch, it's simple. Punch is a total scoundrel who does in everyone he meets, including the Devil, and evil triumphs in the end!



GUS WHITE'S PUNCH.

Olsenmann *New York*

Gus was a quick sketch artist of great prowess. One highlight of the show took place when Punch drew caricatures of famous people and members of the audience. Gus had fashioned a special attachment that enabled Punch to hold a piece of charcoal. And so, while Gus peeked through a hole in the curtain, to secretly see the subject, Punch did the drawing. These drawings were amazing, as you will see.

Among the treasures that came with the theatre were a few fragments of the past that proved to be Fantastic. This official photograph is one. It shows Gus in his younger days. Many of the puppets are as they are today. And, of course, there are several that were lost in the fire of 1905. But Punch and Judy, here, seem different. Possibility, they were earlier versions than those that survive today.

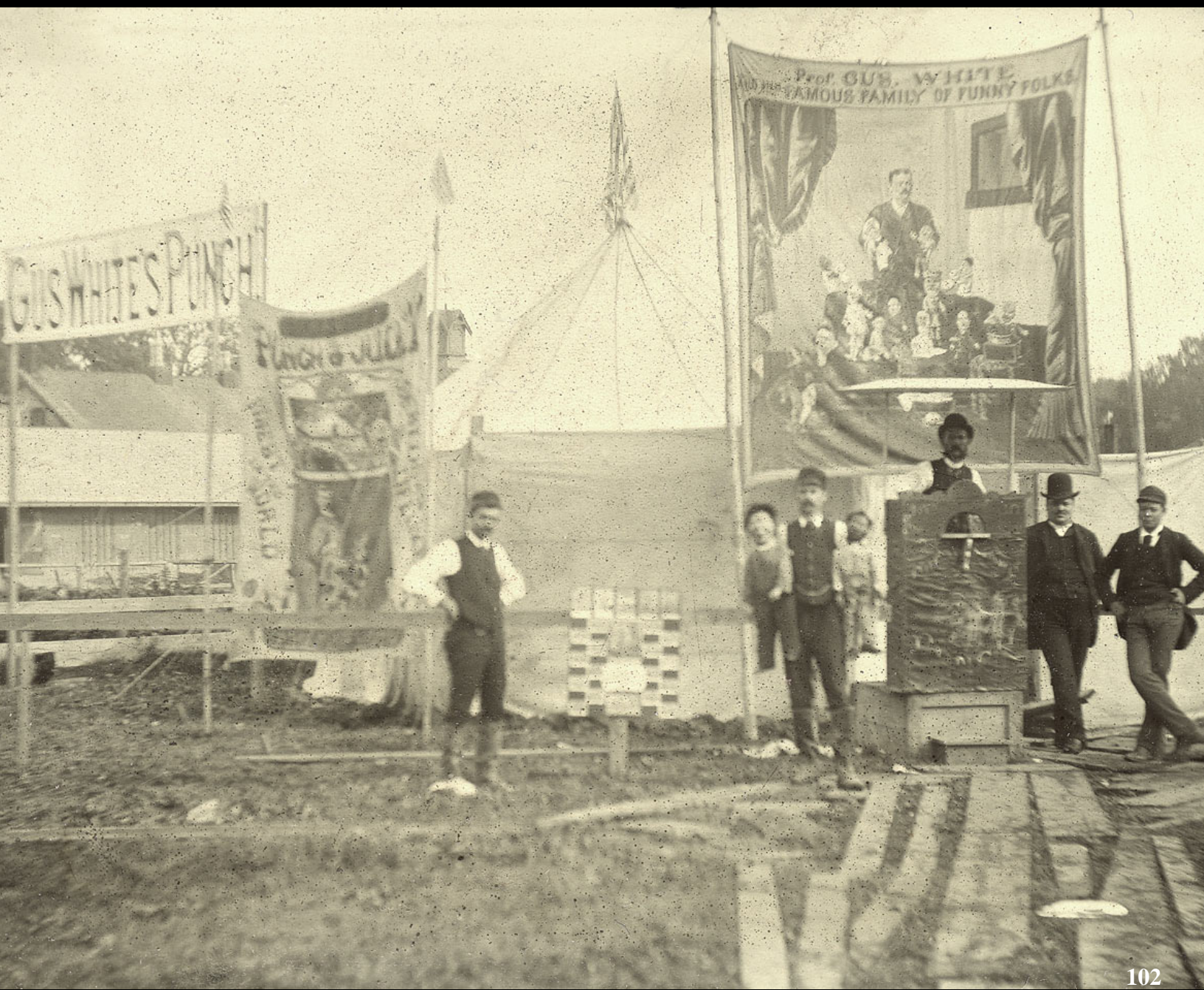
One marvel of the computer is its ability to dig deep, and peel away the veil of time. A modern scanner can squeeze every drop of imagery from even the most seemingly insignificant remnant of ancient photography, and reveal a wealth of detail that is hidden from the naked eye. Magic can happen when a computer is equipped with Photoshop. Let's take another look at that small photo.



As impressive as that appears to be, you aint seen nothing yet! Here are two small tintypes. The images are dark and obscure. They look insignificant, in person. And for some reason, the images are reversed. Now let's show them to the scanner, and let the Magic begin. Here are the originals, actual size.



And here they are enlarged! The tintypes show Gus in his heyday, with his tent and everything, at two different locations. Check out that Fantastic banner! Gus was also a ventriloquist. His two ventriloquist figures, Pete and Patsy, also appear in these photos





And, one more! This was a different challenge. It was faded to a faint image, on the verge of disappearing. Photoshop pulled it from the brink of oblivion. This appears to be some kind of Fair. Many of Gus' performances were preceded by a band to attract an audience. One can sense what it was like to be there. Strike up the band! Isn't this Amazing!



The Christmas after the auction, I took a colored photo of the stage, crowded with many of the players. Then, I got a print made, placed it in a gold frame, and sent it to Harold and Roberta, as a sort of Christmas present, just so the Little People would still be with them, in a way. I knew Harold missed them. They had become a big part of his life. Parting with them wasn't easy for him.

The following Christmas, a package arrived here. It was a present from Harold and Roberta. The most beautiful present I have ever received. In it was this gorgeous photograph circa 1905. This is the real thing, sealed in an elegant antique frame, where, clearly, it has been for the past century. This is most certainly Gus White's own copy of this Fabulous Photograph. It sits here on the desk beside me where I can see it every day. For all their generosity, I don't think even Harold and Roberta realized how much this present meant to me. It was every bit as moving as getting the puppet theatre in the first place.

A year or two ago, a young lady called me from the Goshen Historical society. She was mounting a memorial exhibit in honor of Gus White, and asked if I could supply photos large enough to print large for an exhibit. Therefore, I filled a DVD with images and sent it to her. In the process, I did the unthinkable; I carefully removed this photo from its sealed frame and put it on the scanner. I never heard from her again. I don't even know if the exhibit took place. But I did get a perfectly scanned image of this perfect photo, something I would never have done for myself, and I will share it with you now.



This is Gus White at the very Pinnacle of his career. Here, too, is his complete company of actors, as they appeared in their heyday. Gus is looking inhumanly great, like the paintings of himself that decorate many a sign and banner, advertising Gus White's Punch and Comic Family. On the drawing board is Punch's lightning fast sketch of Teddy Roosevelt, and Happy Holligan, evidence that his drawings were Great!

I have often stared deeply into this photograph for hours, studying how the puppets ought to be, and mourning those that have gone away. Oh, and, by the way, after the auction, Harold and Roberta White invested some of the proceeds from the sale in a handsome stone marker, carved in the shape of a puppet theatre, to adorn Great uncle Gus White's grave.



Post Script:

On October 11th 2013, James Gurney, the great author and illustrator of “Dinotopia,” visited Mouse Heaven. He was accompanied by his wife Jeanette, and Eric and Kristina Millen of “Massive Fantastic.”

James was particularly fascinated by Gus White’s Punch and Comic Family. In a moment of inspiration, he took out his sketchbook and created a fabulous portrait of Happy Hooligan. He then proceeded to the other room where he added the Irish Washerwoman, and the Jewish Peddler, two of Gus White’s Little People, who have not been properly pictured, until now. This event became an entry in Jims amazing blog, “Gurney’s Journey.”



HALLOWEEN

Throughout the 19th Century, Art strove to achieve Reality. Even forays into Fantasy were pictured in realistic terms. Nowhere is this better illustrated than in the Adventures of “Reynard the Fox” (Reincke Fuchs) by Goeth, a breathtaking volume of great luxury, published in 1846, in Germany, and illustrated by Wilhelm Von Kaulbach. It introduces the viewer to a menagerie of incredibly engraved animals, doing things that humans do, or wish they could. This was, a predecessor to the anthropomorphic art of Disney. Here, the artist strove to make his characters seem credible and alive by making them look incredibly “real.”



At the end of the 19 Century Comic Characters appeared, and changed the way we saw the World. Mostly through the pages of the "Funny Papers," they introduced abstraction and stylization into the visual repertoire. And mankind embraced this new visual language, willingly. To trace the development of Comic Characters, one must travel along a road that leads from reality to pure abstraction, from Renard the Fox to Mickey Mouse.

One of the first Steps on the journey to stylization and abstraction was the turn of the Century Halloween Pumpkin Man. This charismatic character was derived from the straightforward simplicity of transforming a pumpkin into a Jack-o-lantern. His spontaneous honesty simplified the essence of looking "alive" into an abstract image that anyone could carve with a paring knife, just as young "Tip" had done In 1904 to create "Jack Pumpkinhead." Then he sprinkled him with the Magical Powder of Life, in "The Marvelous Land of Oz." And the Pumpkin Man's "look" of Life, stylized to its bare essence, became a standard fixture that not only represented Halloween, but opened the door for for the vast repertoire of Comic Characters that followed.

Soon, the stylized features of this powerful pumpkin face began appearing everywhere. Easily recognizable in Jack Pumpkinhead, and, less obviously so, in the abstract lovability of characters like Raggedy Ann and Andy. They are essentially dolls that come to life, and the abstract intensity of their appearance makes this premise credible. Their triangular noses and shoe button eyes are shorthand for "alive". Even their candy hearts, are simple graphic symbols that, to this day, signify "love". In the world of the inanimate, this is the stuff that "Life" is made of.



Did I realize that the Pumpkin Man played a role in the evolution of Comic Characters when I began collecting him? Certainly Not! I just knew that his abstract imagery spoke to me with a powerful audacity that was like the basic ABCs, of the language that inanimate objects “speak”.



This delicious picture puzzle represents the situation nicely, if one reads between the lines, It portrays more than just a lovely world of fantasy. Johnny Gruelle, who's “look” metamorphosed many times, throughout his lifetime, was at his best, at the time he created this. Here is his daughter, Marcella, radiating innocence, and interacting with a trio of naturalistic fairies. In the middle of this realistically rendered scene, is Raggedy Andy. His powerful abstract pumpkin face tells us immediately, and intuitively, that he is the main character, the target of attention. Our eyes are drawn to him like to a bull's-eye.



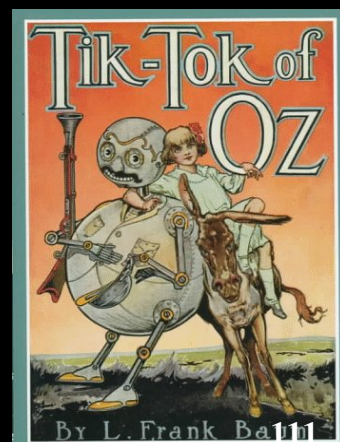
That is exactly what the experience was like, when I first discovered Comic Characters. The power of their abstract imagery graphically hit home to me in the midst of antique shows, like the early ones at the Madison Square Garden. Among row after row of traditional antiques, I would suddenly see the fresh fierce face of a Comic Character. Some would say this object was out of place in that ocean of fine antiques. But it was that very contrast that made it stand out so dramatically. And the face that appeared there, with increasing frequency, was that of Mickey!

But, in those early days, even when a show was awful, it seemed like I could often reconcile the trip to some distant college gymnasium, early on a Saturday morning, by picking up a few stray pieces of Halloween. Early Jack-O-Lantern figures seemed to lie around, long after the show began, or hide in boxes underneath a dealer's table, inexpensive, and often catching no one's eye, but mine. I had no reason to believe that anyone was actively collecting them, until years later, when I ran into a woman, at the Stormville Flea Market, who called herself "The Halloween Queen". For a long time I had lived in a state of grace, in which that familiar pumpkin face was just there for the picking, like low hanging fruit on a pumpkin tree. That era came to an end abruptly, and I soon found myself having to choose between, expensive Mickey, or expensive Halloween. Expensive Mickey, won the day. Thus, Destiny had decreed that I would never be a Halloween King .

Like everything else in this collection, Halloween was all a visual thing for me. I didn't care for, or collect witches, ghosts, bats and black pussy cats. My Halloween collecting wasn't about Halloween. It was just about the primitive imagery of the powerful pumpkin face, which noticeably dominates this showcase.



In the center of the case is an image that perhaps needs some explaining. It is out of context, I know. But, somehow, it seemed apropos. It is a paper on wood target game manufactured by Bliss. It dates from the same era as the pumpkin face, the Turn of the Century, and portrays, the World's most Famous Clown for over half a century, Humpty Dumpty. Directly above him is a once common object, a tin Jack-O-lantern. Children used to carry these with a lit candle inside, in Halloween Night parades. The black handlebar moustache, which is always present on this particular object, is reminiscent of "Tik Tok," another abstraction from the land of OZ



My favorite Halloween item, is the one below, the Pumpkin Man in a Jack-O-lantern Ascension Balloon. It is a mechanical toy with an internal windup motor. The basket is woven exactly as a real basket would be. Like almost all Halloween toys from the Turn of the Century, it was made in Germany. When one holds the basket and pulls the ring to extend the string, this winds the motor.



When the balloon is released, it ascends the string again, while the pumpkin passenger animatedly waves his arms. I have seen similar ascension balloon toys from the same era, but never with a Halloween theme.



I obtained this one of a kind rarity at one of the first Brimfields. I remember the very moment, as vividly, as if it were yesterday. It was late in the day; Brimfield was a one day show, back then. My friend John Fawcett and I were walking along together, dragging, I should say, for we had been there since daybreak. We were both exhausted, and at the same time, unwilling to give up. Things were continuing to show up. Suddenly, I spotted this pumpkin man, at a booth on the other side of John. I let out a yelp and made a dive past him that nearly knocked him off his feet, a flying leap! I was fast, but alas, not fast enough. From my position still in midair, I saw John's hand reach down and pick it up. My heart sank! And, then, before my heart could miss another beat, he handed it to me! That's what I call a true friend! I am still grateful to this day... for both his generosity, and the toy.

Now, the balloon soars higher, floating above a dazzling City of Light. Beneath it, is a vast Pumpkin Panorama, glowing as far as the eye can see. This is Jack-O-lantern Land, where every night is Halloween!



In the bottom left corner of the case is a fabulous Jack-O-lantern in the form of Foxy Grandpa; evidence of the common bond between the Jack-O-lantern image and comic characters, especially in the early days. His hair perks up to suggest a look that is demonic. Having spent a lifetime living with these objects, I tend to take them all for granted. But, every once in a while, I am reminded of how miraculous it really is that any of them have survived. Here is a fragile Foxy Jack-O-lantern with eyes and teeth printed on the thinnest tissue paper, in pristine mint condition, a hundred Halloweens later.



If I have not, yet, convinced you that the Pumpkin Man was a first step on the road to Mickey, I present, below, exhibit "A", in which he takes a giant leap, and goes almost all the way, transforming into Mickey Mouse, himself. These images were made in Germany in the early 1930s. They were not likely to have been licensed from Disney, but the "influence" of Mickey is all there. They display the telltale evidence that they are very early, for the artist who created them, as was often the case in the early days, failed to notice that Mickey only has four fingers. Mickey's ears have been represented, with a certain amount of understatement, by two black leaves. The diverse patterns on his pants, are an element that only an artist who is not bound by conforming to a model sheet would have the freedom and imagination to conceive.



BROWNIES & KEWPIES

Displaying Palmer Cox's "Brownies" and Rose O'Neill's "Kewpies" together, is purely arbitrary. They ended up in the same showcase, simply because I was running out of space, and didn't have enough images of either to merit their own case. Nevertheless, these two divergent creations have some things in common. They both represent the very earliest successes in Licensing and Merchandising. The Brownies were created before the Turn of the Century, by Palmer Cox, an illustrator born in Canada. They became the first Comic Characters to lend their faces to a variety of licensed products. The best known of these, being the Kodak "Brownie Camera". And Rose O'Neill, a hugely talented artist, who led a fabulous life, alluded to in the song and movie, "Rose of Washington Square," created the first hugely popular dolls in history, the Kewpies. At one point, she was the highest paid woman illustrator in America.



There is a footnote to her story, or one might better say a parallel history that has always been of great interest to me. And that is the story of Joseph Kallus. So many of the dolls and figurines he made are exquisite works of art. The Comic Character images that he not only sculpted, but manufactured as the owner of the "Comeo Doll Factory" were pose-able sculptures that sold in vast quantities to the children of America, for just a dollar.

The Kewpies were perhaps only a small part of Rose O'Neill's body of work, which ranged from magazine and book illustration to painting and sculpture, but Kewpies are the creation for which she will always be remembered. They first appeared in the pages of Good House Keeping Magazine and other early publications.

In 1912 George Borgfeldt & Company was looking for an artist to render Rose O'Neill's Kewpies in the form of figurines and other products that were to be manufactured in Germany, and imported for the American Market. They hired a 17 year old art student from Pratt institute (my alma mater, too) named, Joseph Kallus. The rest is history, which you can read in fascinating detail by clicking the links above.

Over the years, I have seen many Kewpie figurines that simply took my breath away. On the other hand, I saw no need to acquire or collect these. The element of discovery was simply not there for me. They had been so thoroughly collected and preserved by many who came before me, all ladies, naturally. And whatever way you look at it, Kewpies are a girls thing. Nonetheless, a few Kewpies came my way that I could not resist.

The first is this, already seen in the above showcase. He or she deserves a portrait of their own. I picked this Kewpie up, quite literally, at a run-of-the-mill toy show held at a motel in New Jersey, picked it up to admire it, and, simply, couldn't set it down. It was probably just standard issue, in its day, the early 1900s, but, 50 years later, I saw it as extraordinary. It really is a delicate masterpiece, a classic example of endowing an inanimate object with a life-force of great intensity. This image is alive. And it is a crash course in doll artistry. The eyes, looking to one side, is one way that one can convey inner life. Years later, I emulated this unconsciously and intuitively in Baby Face. Only now, in my old age, have I come to realize why.



The Kewpies have an appeal that is universal. The essence of their charm does not depend on the delicacy of fine china to be effective, although that helps. Magic also radiates from these simple celluloid dolls sweetly dressed in crepe paper. They were, perhaps, intended to decorate a wedding cake. I shot this photo of this pair, now buried in the above showcase, when I first acquired them, while living in NYC.



Many years ago I came across this imposingly large Kewpie Idol at one of the major Antique Shows. It was some sort of a display piece, a reminder of the days when such spectacular imagery was still rendered in plaster, rather than the more lightweight medium of papier mache. This monumental effigy stands nearly three feet tall, and is perched atop a pedestal, in the corner of the bell tower that doubles as a bedroom in this museum/home. Like an oasis of serenity, amidst a sea of chachkas, it is the only object in the room. Oh, on second thought, I take that back, there is a wooden Donald Duck, from a French carousel as well.

The plaster, in which this is cast, was actually tinted pink, rendering the need for paint unnecessary. Alas, the absorbent plaster is not impervious to the ravages of time, but the mottled surface, captured by the camera's eye, is unnoticeable in person, and disappears, altogether, when on a typical day, the figure is bathed in strong sunlight. And once the sun has set, this familiar friendly spirit becomes a comforting companion, standing guard, throughout the night.



I was a bit more energetic when it comes to collecting Brownies. But I was also more selective. I got sucked into the collectors syndrome of the need for completeness, to some degree, with Mickey Mouse. But not so with Brownies. Subject matter wise, they were resistible. A World made up of only little men was not my cup of tea, and, furthermore, the art that went into Brownie products evidenced a lack of consistency. Nonetheless, on a few notable occasions, I came across a Brownie item that was extraordinary. When Brownies are good, they are very very good, and when they are not, they are just so so. Somewhere between the two extremes are the Majolica figurines, candle holders, and head shaped containers in the above showcase. I collected these when they fell my way, until I eventually realized they were never going to stop coming, repetitive variations on a theme. When it reached a point where some subtle new variation, if priced a few bucks too high, was enough to enable me to pass it by, I stopped collecting them. I realized that there was no Brownie Bill of Rights that proclaimed or guaranteed that "All Brownies Are Created Equal!"

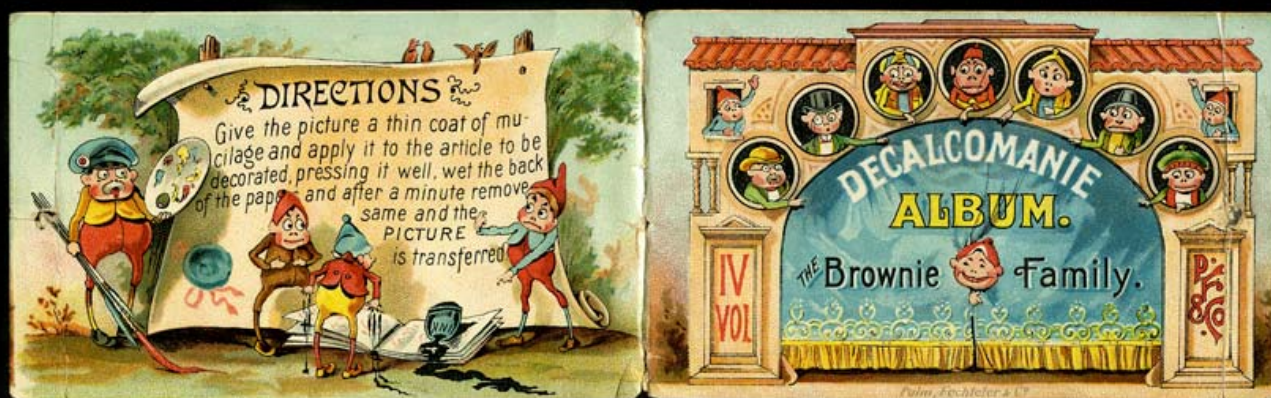
On the other hand, I have come across a few brownie items that are amazing! We'll get to those in a minute, first a couple of very minor things that strike me as just OK to extremely pleasing. This printer set, for instance, is just OK. The sort of thing I would pick up when a show I traveled to was not great. This was a consolation prize.



I really like this colorful cigar box Brownies on the outside, and inside, a rather spectacular label. I keep these small colorful books of decals inside the box.

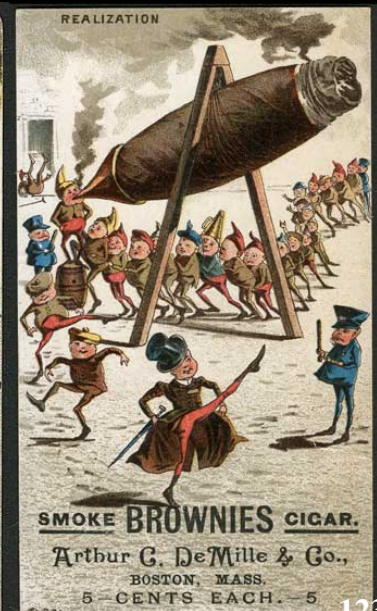
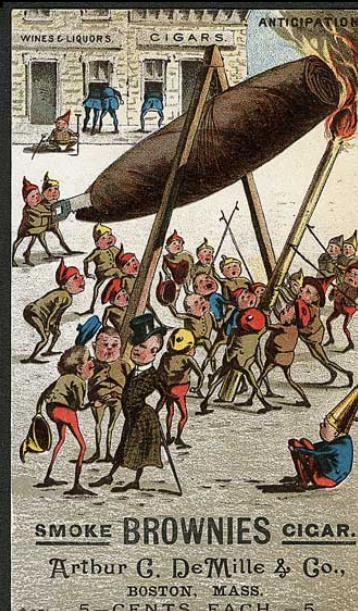
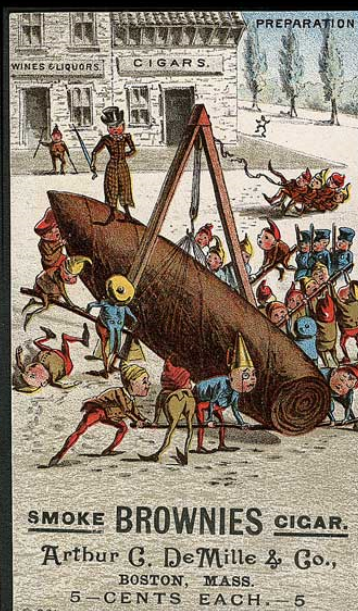


Here is a set, in which a child has applied the decals to small pieces of paper and cut them out, so that the complex drawings can be viewed. This is going to require a bit of fancy scanning, but I think it may be worth it. A lot of effort and artwork went into creating these preciously minute little items, artwork that is hidden, unless it's transferred onto something else.





Here is something I didn't know I had. I just now discovered these, underneath the "Decacomanies" in that cigar box. They are a series of four trade cards. Viewed consecutively, they depict the elaborate process that Brownies must go through to light and smoke a cigar that they apparently find lying in the street. It requires an elaborate group effort, reminiscent of a scene from Gulliver. The process requires four steps. "Appropriation," as they pick it up, "Preparation," as they hoist it up, "Anticipation," as they light it up, and finally, "Realization," as they all line up, under police supervision, to have a puff. Judging from the "Dudes" reaction, it was worth the effort.



This trio of Candy Containers, Is much more exciting. I watched, sadly, as a guy I didn't know bought them right under my nose at Brimfield. Three years later he sold them to me. Obviously, there was a whole set of these. I am glad to have at least these three. In front of them is a wonderful pair of Brownie wrestlers, or are they dancers, or maybe acrobats? What do you think? I have seen similar toys in which the figures were intended to represent all three activities. At any rate, they're Great!



I do have two absolutely extraordinary Brownie items. The first is a fabulous tapestry, or rug. I'm not sure which it is, but it is extraordinary, and extraordinarily difficult to display. I never found any place to put it. It should be hanging on the wall of a museum. It is big, 10' feet long by 10' feet wide, and it is woven in one piece. It depicts an ambitious Brownie scene, a crowd of Brownies involved in sports of every variety.

As there is a fringe on the top and bottom edge, and none on the sides, I've decided that it must be a rug. Whoever owned this for its first sixty years of life must have had the same difficulty finding a place to place it as I did, over the past forty five. For it has, obviously, never been walked upon by anyone. And it is as clean and bright, on both sides, as if it were woven yesterday.



The art is Amazing in its complexity. There are 100 Brownies, around the border, alone, and many more in the scene. They are doing many things, boxing, archery, tennis, and a bicycle race, presided over by an organ grinder and his monkey. In the middle right, is an entire baseball game, teeming with spectators, rooting for their team. There are Brownies blowing horns, and others shooting marbles, and in the upper right hand corner, an agitated crowd appears to be engaged in shooing away stray cats! Around the inner scene, is a border of chickens, ducks, fish, cats, and rats. And in the outer border of trees, are birds, owls, squirrels, and bats. This monumental work of art is utterly Fantastic!

When you clicked on this Brownie page the scene below is not what you expected to see. Nor did I intend anything like it to be here, not yet, anyway. But the effort to clear a space, and figure out how to reach the edge of the balcony to point a camera, with glass topped cabinets in the way, was such a pain that while there, perched precariously, sweating profusely, and trying not to bust the glass or my derriere, I refocused the camera lens, and shot the entire scene. It does give perspective to the carpet, and what I had to do to get a photograph. Can you believe that the head-on view of the rug above was created from a shot like this?



Last, and Best of all, is what I could believe might be the World's Best Brownie piece. Acquiring it was an adventure, fueled by obsession and frustration. At least 25 years ago, this ad appeared in either the Maine Antiques Digest, or the Newtown Bee. It was one of those ads, in which dealers submit a photograph of an item they intend to bring to an upcoming show. I saw this and went NUTZ!



Terra Cotta figures riding the Republican elephant representing the people suffering from the financial depression of 1893-94. The elephant and figures are approximately 16" x 16".



WILLIAM W. LEWIS

RESIDENCE: SPOFFORD, N. H. 03462

TELEPHONE: 603-363-4363

APPOINTMENT ONLY

So, I called the dealer up. He turned out to be a pedantic cantankerous old goat, as stubborn and irrational as a mule. As the ad indicates, he had no idea what the item he had was. He assured me it was the "Peoples March on Washington". And there was no way he would sell it to me, or hold it for me, nor did he have the slightest idea what he wanted for it. In the process of trying to prove myself worthy as a truly interested party, I broke one of W.C. Fields' cardinal rules, "Never smarten up a chump" and disclosed the fact that they were Brownies. Apparently another caller had told him the same thing. He refused to believe it, anyway.

Throughout a week of negotiations on the phone, during which time, the unstated price, clearly, rose, he finally, reluctantly, agreed to hold it for me for 5 minutes after the opening of the show, which was in some woe begotten town in Maine. So, I drove all night, and there I was, among the first in line at Maine's idea of a modern Motel, the following day. The Brownie Elephant, Thank God, wasn't on display. It was in a cardboard box, shoved in the corner of his booth of austere and unrelated early American antiques, looking like an insignificant lump of clay. The price he came up with, at the end of the day, redefined the term "Not Cheap." But I drove home, on cloud nine, all the way.



By the way, the photo in the newspaper revealed the wrong side. This amazing terra cotta monument is big and spectacular, and in some primitive, Turn of the Century way, was partially “manufactured.” The elephant and each Brownie was cast in slip clay. They are hollow inside. And then, each was posed and attached by hand to the huge hollow elephant. This method permitted and indicated that more than one were made, although, each would require a great deal of hand labor.

My overwhelming exuberance enabled me to rise to the occasion, and do an inspired restoration. Several hands and feet, and one entire figure, were missing, and had to be replaced. Did I do a good job? Suffice it to say, my friend Noel Barrett of Antiques Roadshow fame, couldn’t spot which one I made. This single Brownie item is a collection, in itself, and more than good enough for me.



FOXY GRANDPA

Many of the very earliest Comic Characters have survived, and are either still around, or are, at least, still well remembered. The "Katzenjammer Kids", come to mind. Begun in 1897, it is the longest running comic strip of all time. "Happy Hooligan," "Mutt and Jeff," these are names that still have a familiar ring. But one character, who was once immensely popular, "Foxy Grandpa," has danced off, into oblivion. Does anyone know who Foxy Grandpa was, today?

I, for one, had never heard of him. But, as I began to seek out early comic imagery, his name and face appeared, time and again. And, once again, because no one else was collecting him, I found myself, somewhat halfheartedly, picking up an occasional Foxy Grandpa piece. And, as time went by, I gained a deep respect for this early character, whose good humored Foxiness always enabled him to outsmart his two ten year old grandsons, who were forever trying to put one over on him.

On the last day of the first week of the Twentieth Century, January 7, 1900, Foxy Grandpa appeared. He was created by the cartoonist Carl E. Schultz. Schultz drew the comic strip, under the pen name, "Bunny", which had been his nickname as a kid.

Over time, Schultz came to sign the strip with an image of a bunny, who, eventually, became a sort of character in the story, with reactions that were a running commentary on what was going on.



FOXY GRANDPA



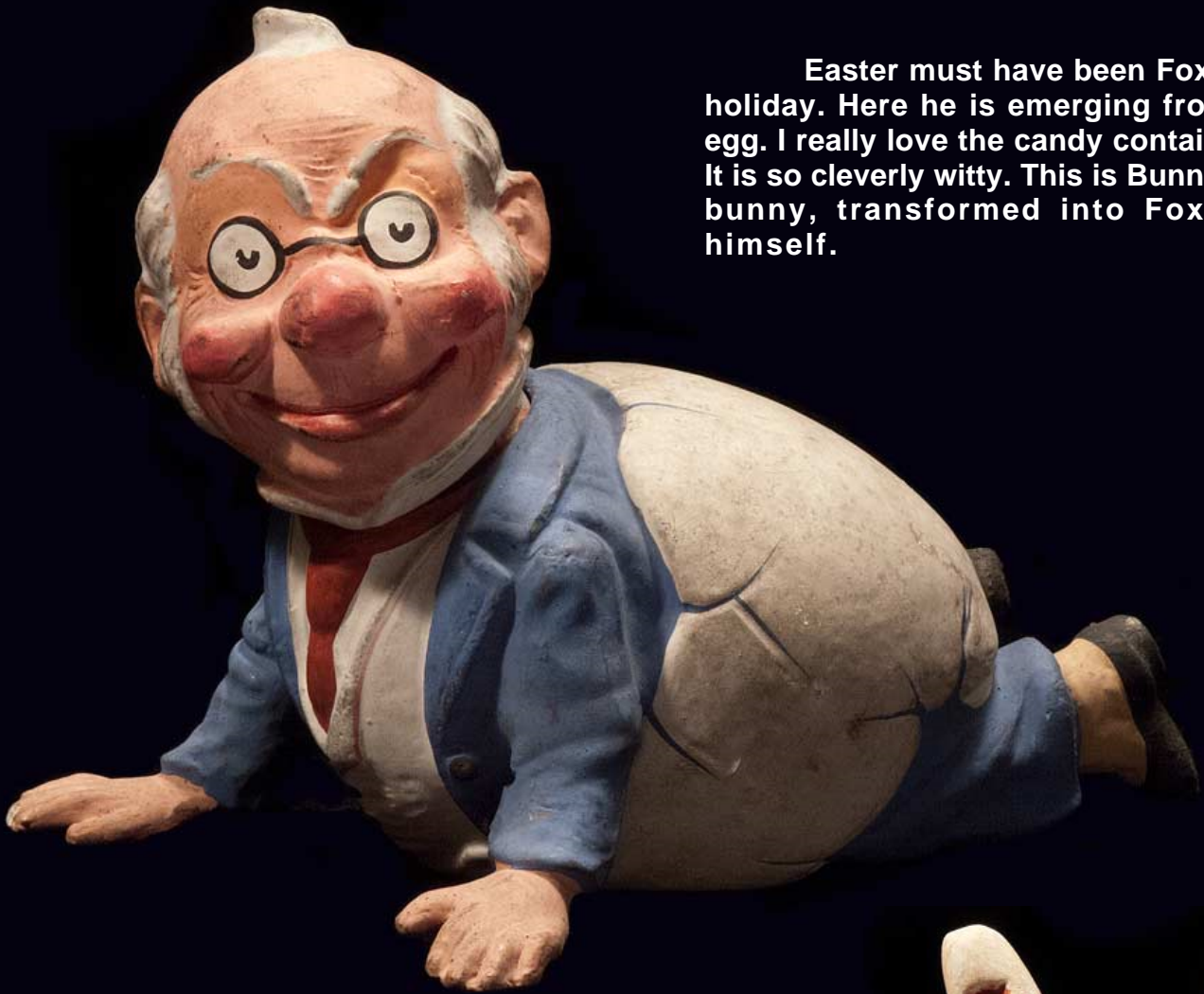
ALWAYS JOLLY

Foxy Grandpa was an immediate hit. The strip ran in the New York herald for two years, then moved to the New York American, where it lasted, more or less, until 1917. During those years, Foxy Grandpa appeared in many books and toys and other merchandise, some of which was quite extraordinary. I've found some gorgeous Foxy Grandpa things, objects too nice to be tucked away on a top shelf, out of reach, and almost out of sight, simply because I'm almost out of space. I really owe it to his memory to pick a few things out and photograph them separately.

The most Spectacular Foxy Grandpa object I've found is this majestic candy container. It's got everything going for it, form, size, and condition. Easily a century old, it looks like it was made yesterday. And it embodies a touch of, most likely, accidental irony, for Foxy, created by Bunny, is riding on an Easter Bunny. Foxy's head, which is balanced on a spring, wiggles incessantly; so do his feet.



Easter must have been Foxy Grandpa's holiday. Here he is emerging from an Easter egg. I really love the candy container, below it. It is so cleverly witty. This is Bunny's signature bunny, transformed into Foxy Grandpa, himself.



I wondered how I was going to fill this negative space. While trying to fill it up with words, I suddenly remembered that there were more Foxys. So, I went over and grabbed this small candy container. It is really quite extraordinary. Note Foxy's miniature lead glasses and his tiny index finger. How do such delicate details survive a hundred years?



Anyone who has ever trekked around the fields of Brimfield has come across dolls like this. I have seen so many, over the years, in all variations of condition; some were much better than the one below. Apparently it was made in 1902, two years after Foxy first appeared, which is testimony to his instant popularity. It also took two years for the first Mickey Mouse toys to appear. Looking at this large doll now, I am appreciating its appealing chubbiness, with that familiar Bunny tucked under his arm. I love the way the delicate and flamboyant line work, especially, on his face, in its graceful symmetry, becomes abstract calligraphy. And, by the way, this curious character, created at the turn of the century, had Pie-Cut Eyes, three decades before Mickey



This set of dolls is rather curious. Their condition is amazing, on the surface, considering that they're one hundred plus years old. But, their faces leave a lot to be desired. I believe they might have been molded of wax beneath their fabric exterior. This is a quaint and antiquated method of manufacture that did not hold up well, over the years.



This painted tin toy has a rather strange action, one that I have never seen before, or since. Foxy's legs move sideways, as he jumps up and down.



Has anyone ever seen this elegant humidor before? Not me! My friend Bernie Shine pointed it out to me on eBay. I immediately became the only bidder. This impressive object sits on the desk beside me, among my favorite things. It is made of some sort of ceramic, and is an impressive 11 inches high. Foxy Grandpa is here portrayed as a rather refined gentleman, sedately partaking of a bit of snuff, his open snuff box in his hand. He has a pleasant pensive look about him, characteristically content and wise, and quite alive. Someone has just captured his attention. He raises his head in anticipation.



In 1902 a musical comedy based on Foxy Grandpa appeared on Broadway. Foxy was portrayed with great gusto by the actor, Joseph Heart. Heart also starred as Foxy, again, in a series of live action silent movie shorts, produced by the Biograph Company. The films employed the actual sets and costumes from the Broadway production. The fact that Foxy was on Broadway, just two years after he was introduced, is testimony to his instant popularity. Here is an actual photograph of Joseph Heart in the role. Beside it, is a rather elegant plaster statue that is very much in the same spirit as the photo



Last of all, is something Extraordinary. It's one reason Foxy is getting a long page. These images appear to be printer's proofs of part of an amazing book. I have never seen or heard of anything, like them, from this era. I wonder if a book was ever produced, and if it, in fact, exists. Each page is actually a self-contained optical toy that operates on the same principal as the "Polyorama Panoptic", a Nineteenth Century device, in which a scene is transformed, from day to night, when illuminated from behind by a bright light.

Each image measures 10" X 18", with generous margins that extend under a matte which measures 14" X 22". All were double matted with acetate windows on both the front and back, when I discovered them at Brimfield, 30 years ago.

Each image measures 10" X 18", with generous margins that extend under a matte which measures 14" X 22". All were double matted with acetate windows on both the front and back, when I discovered them at Brimfield, 30 years ago.

I have kept my eyes open, over the past 30 years, alert for any hint that might solve the mystery of these magic sheets, and, hopefully, lead to more amazing images, like these, or maybe, an entire book full of them. But, these tantalizing objects are all that I've discovered, and, to this day, remain unique. Because each image has a number in one corner, I assume that these are part of a whole book of transformations. If so, it was not a part of the series of comic character books, prevalent at the time. Those always measured a standard 10" x 16".

Because I am so enthusiastic about these, I will share all that I have of them with you, as close as the screen will allow to their actual size. Just pass your mouse over each image to see it magically transform.

This first sheet, which appears to be a kind of title page, is slightly different from the others, in that the back is laminated to look like plain white paper. All the other sheets have not been finished, in this way. On the reverse side of them, one can see the complex art that makes the transformation happen. It's pretty amazing. But I'll leave that to your imagination, as we are running out of space. Because this sheet is laminated, a brighter source of illumination is required and the results are not as bright. This entire presentation appears to have been going through a process of experimentation.

There is something else that is curious about these images. I've noticed that throughout the many Foxy Grandpa strips I've seen, Foxy's grandsons' names were never mentioned. He simply referred to them as "the boys". But, here, he clearly calls them "Dick" and "Harry." Having had these pages for thirty years, I always considered that to be their names. Looking up some dates on Google, I discovered that all the mentions of them, there, proclaim their names were "Chub" and "Bunt"! That's what they, apparently, were called in the cast of characters from the Broadway Show, in 1902. I wonder if that was the only place those names were used, and one subsequent mention, after another, perpetrated a misnomer, or if Schultz changed their names to Dick and Harry, himself, late in the game.



On the website version of this page, the images transform by moving the mouse over them. Here both views are shown. The normal image is above, and what it becomes when seen with a light behind it is shown below.

GUESS WHO?



© Carl E. Schuttz -



GUESS WHO?

HURRAH!
It's our
old
friend



Foxy Grandpa

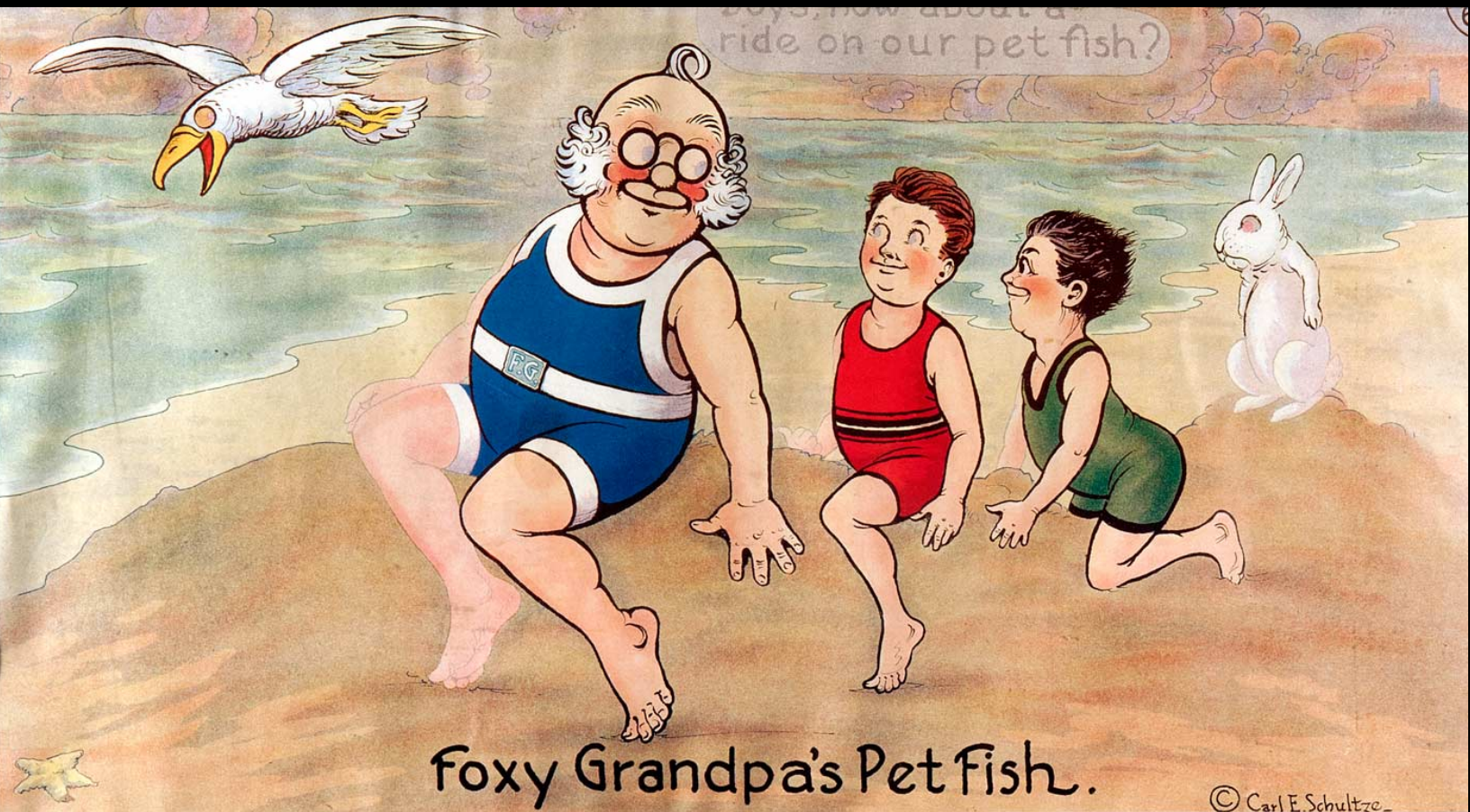
his twin grandsons Dick and Harry,
and his little old rabbit **Bunny**.

© Carl E. Schuttz -

In this one, Foxy is about to be "surprised" by being doused with a hose. But he outfoxes the boys, by suddenly producing an umbrella. At the same time, the artist's "Bunny" appears, laughing, in the window. The effect is dramatic and beautifully conceived.



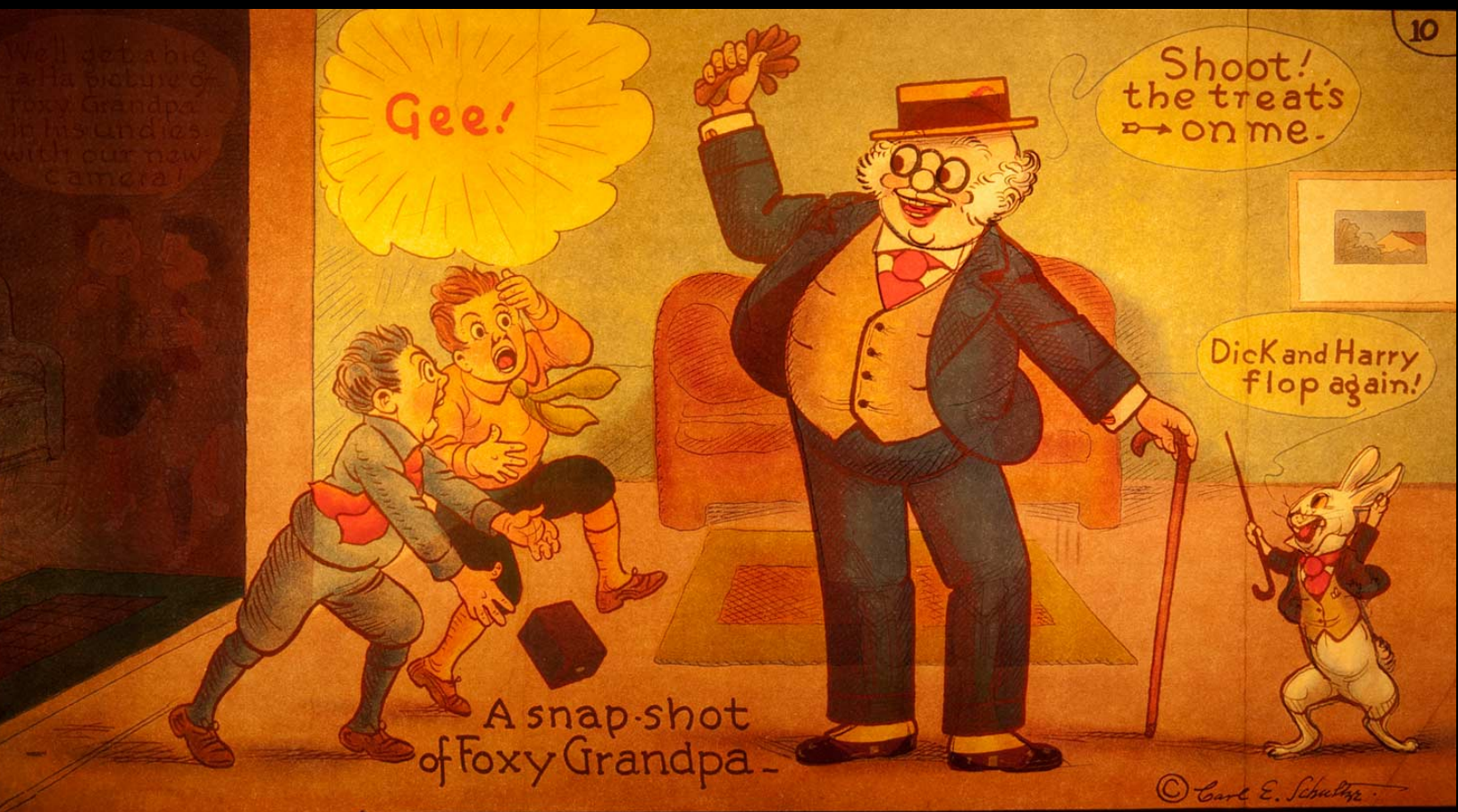
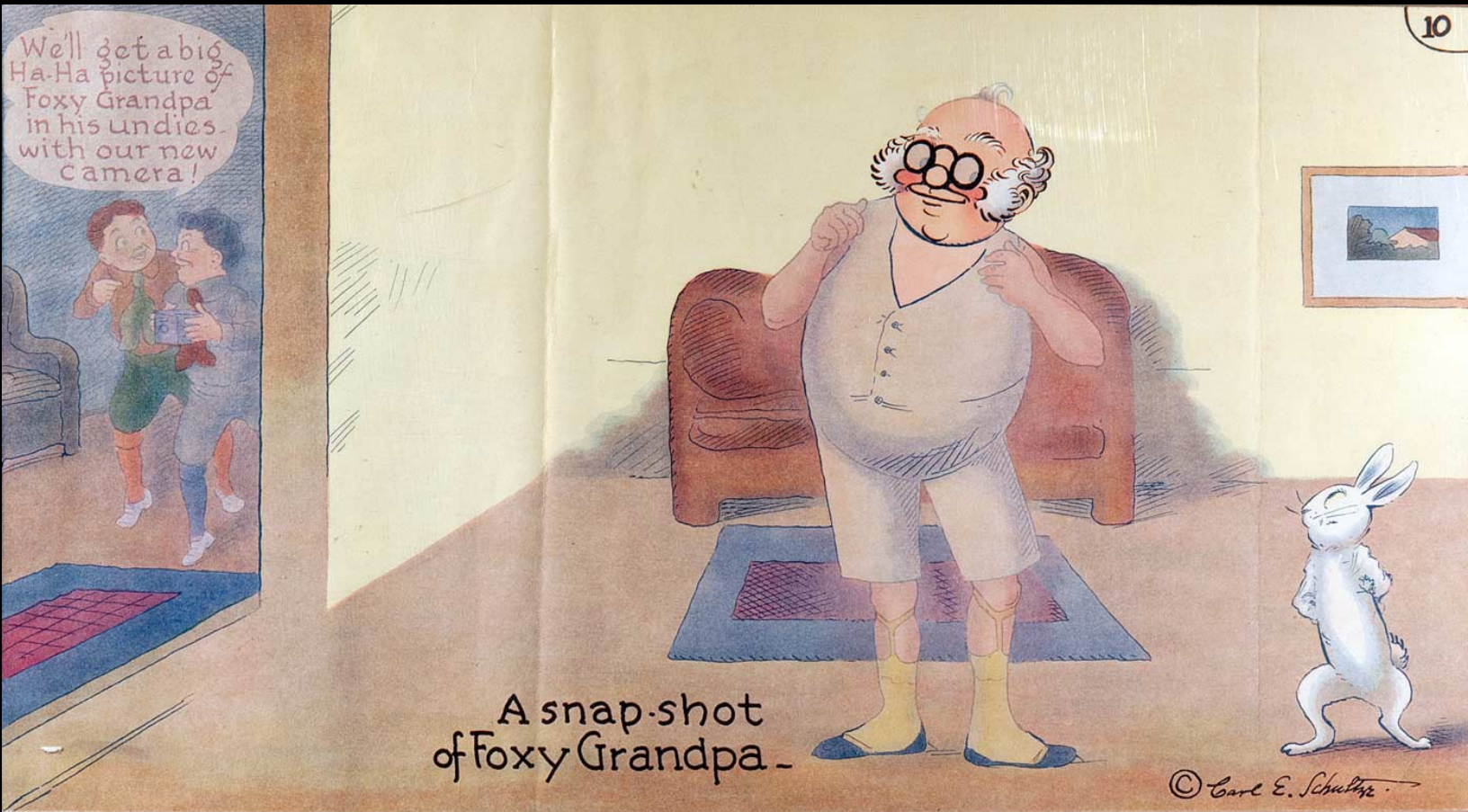
The wild imagery of Foxy Grandpa's Pet Fish is reminiscent of the magical grotesqueries of George M  l  es. These drawings have an inventive complexity that can be studied for hours. There are so many forms of visual trickery at play.



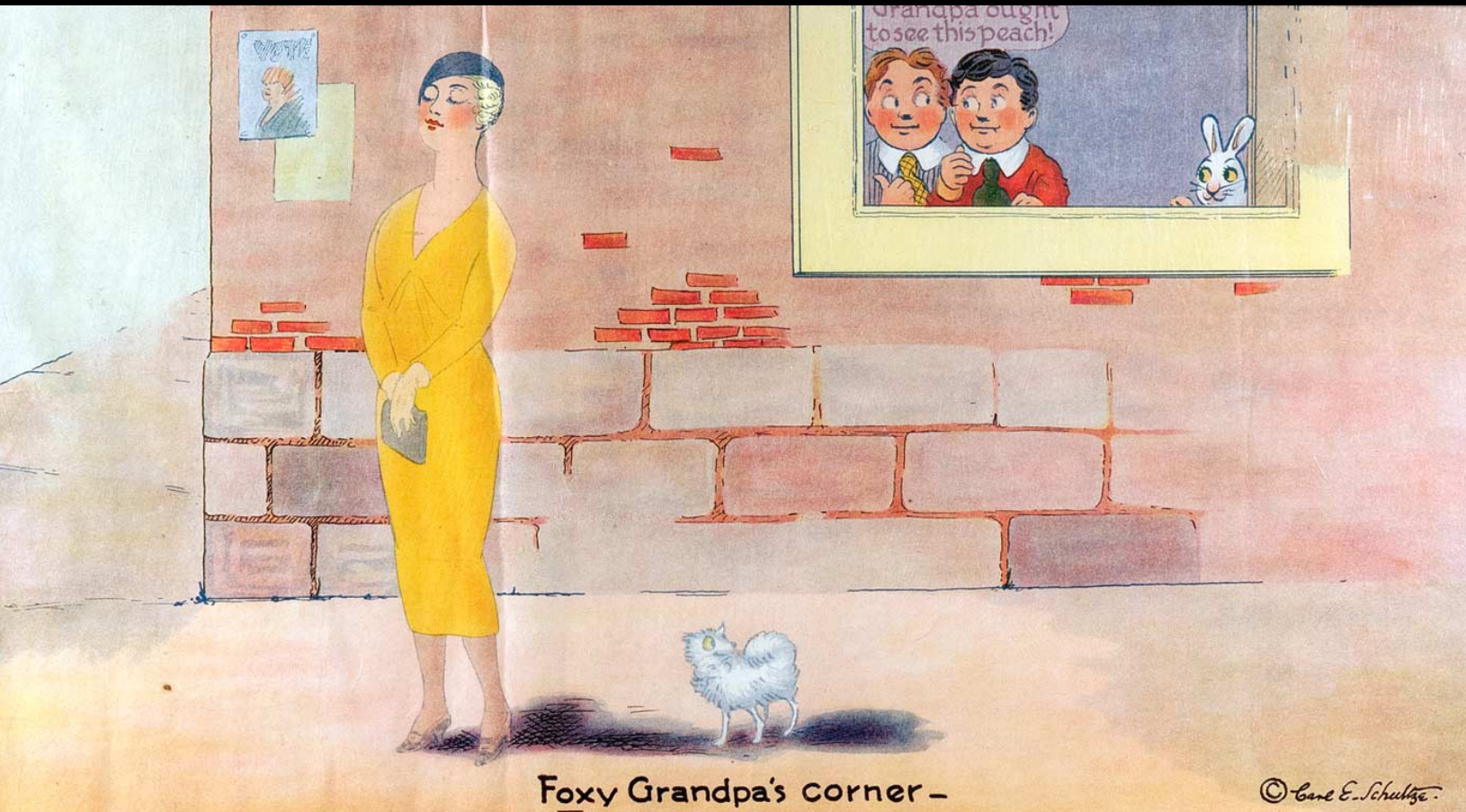
In this dramatic transformation, notice how objects lightly drawn, in the beginning, become negative space, in the transformed scene. Foxy



Attempting to take photos of your grandpa in his undies? Nothing has changed much in the past Century, except an I-Pod has replaced the Kodak Brownie. And the photographs will be posted on YouTube, for everyone to see!



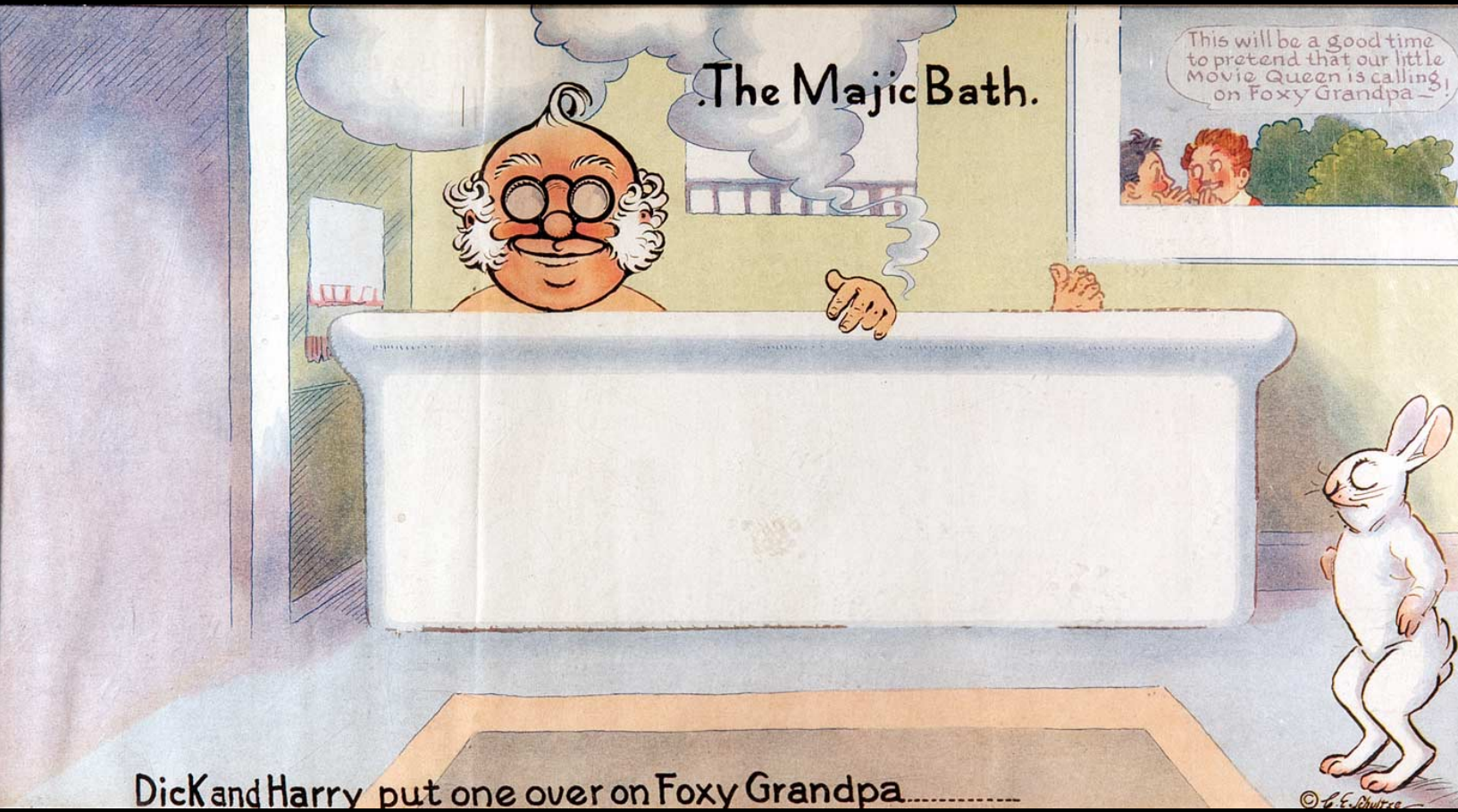
Is it my imagination, or is there something timely about this illustration? I guess that guy must be a Hollywood Sheik. I notice that both the delivery boy and the dog are smoking. The little white dog becomes negative space. And look at the expression on the bunny's face



Here's a curiosity! Is this a lesson in history, or a two century old prophecy?



That pure white bathtub and steamy bathroom are, pretty much, a blank slate, where anything can take place! And Bunny doesn't disappoint us! Spectacular!





Directly behind Barney are two very early dolls of Mutt and Jeff. To the far left are Max and Moritz who are even earlier than, and some believe were the inspiration for Hans and Fritz. Next are a trio of sculptures from the same series as the plaster Foxy we just saw. They are Happy Hooligan, his brother, Gloomy Gus and a hobo friend. On the other end of the case, is a Steiff tea cozy of Mama Katzenjammer, and a Steiff doll of Happy Hooligan.



These great American Icons, were the work of many men, each creating a World of his own, and populating it with entities that, in their very unreality, were real. They became familiar friends, and Americans of all ages visited with them, daily, in the pages of the Funny Papers. That is the place where all the comic characters lived, before the advent of the movies. This seems like as good a time as any to go downstairs and visit the tower of early Comic Characters.

THE FUNNY FOLKS

The Wall in The Great Hall is clearly the domain of Mickey Mouse. But Felix, Popeye, and Betty Boop, were granted prime real estate there as well. So it was fitting that there should be, at least, one grand and glorious showcase, dedicated to the earliest Comic Characters, those who began it all. Thus, many of the early Funny Folks wound up in this showcase. It was soon full!



The Yellow Kid is at the pinnacle. The tower that he sits atop is yellow. That is fitting, as he was the founder of them all. Only my astute friend Noel picked up on this. There is a little bit of everybody here, anybody who was anybody that is, anybody popular enough to find themselves manifest as toys, dolls or figurines.

Just because it should be done, I'll identify some of the above: Hanging from the ceiling, are Foxy Grandpa and Happy Hooligan. Happy has a policeman by the ears.

On the walls, are the 6 known Comic Character varieties of the beautiful Raphael Tuck jumping jack valentines. First are Little Nemo and Flip from Slumberland. Then, on the back wall, are Happy Hooligan and Buster Brown, who is hard to find with his fragile paint brush intact. And lower down, are Mama Katzenjammer, elevating Hans and Fritz, and Foxy Grandpa with his two grandsons.

On top of the tower, of course, is The yellow kid. Just below him. are jointed dolls of Maggie and Jiggs. Like many of the figures in this showcase, they were made by the Swiss company Bucherer, and are fully poseable with intricate metal ball and socket joints. In the middle, is Foxy Grandpa, with his grandkids, Harry, Dick, and a bunny, between his legs.

On the next level down, starting on the left, is a composition doll of Foxy. Then, at the back, is a Bucherer Happy Hooligan. This is a rare doll. His clothes are a bit tattered, but, after all, he is a hobo! Happy, riding a rabbit, is a candy container. In front of him, is a Bucherer doll of Fritz. Hans, Mama and der Captain Katzenjammer follow. Then, there is Happy Hooligan on a bunny again. This complex candy container is in amazing condition; Happy's original woven basket and paper parasol are there. He is completely hiding a lovely Bucherer doll of Harrison Cady's Peter Rabbit.

Moving down, the shelves get longer. In the corner, is a doll of Mickey McGuire, animated by air pressure, and a tiny spring toy of Fritz. Next, on the left, is a bisque vase, depicting Jackie Cooper, and an air activated toy of Buttercup. There are two bisque Buttercups on the same shelf. They are additional figures from the Nodder series. Here, too, are four Bucherer dolls of characters from Regular Fellers: Pinhead, Puddinhead, Jimmy and Aggie, with Maud the Mule, bursting out of an egg, in the middle. On the right, is Foxy riding a "Bunny" bunny. And behind him is Buster Brown, riding Tige, and an animated Buster Brown toy in the corner.

On the bottom are several Real noddors. I mean they were really designed to nod. Their heads rock back and forth, on purpose. The first is "Sy", Maud's master, then, Hans and Fritz and the Captain. The captain's spanking arm is poseable. Then, there is a Mama and the Katzenjammer Kids candy container, followed by another one of her, holding a spanking switch. Beating the butts of Hans and Fritz played a big role in this strip. And last of all, is Foxy Grandpa, riding on an Easter bunny.

Poor Peter Rabbit, He got covered up in the photo, above. I just realized that I have another one, upstairs, along with a fabulous Peter Rabbit doll from 1912. I had forgotten all about them, as they are hidden behind my computer. I guess I might as well include them here, as I haven't made any plans to include them, elsewhere. This large doll, by the way, is made by the same company and in the same style as a known series of rare Little Nemo Dolls. The smaller Peter Rabbit is by Bucherer.

I just realized that I left a whole section out. I didn't allow a logical place to include it. That place will now be here. So, let's continue to another showcase upstairs that contains a mixed selection, not especially attractively arranged, of the early funny paper characters.



In the middle of the case is a stunning, and stunningly rare, bisque figurine of Moon Mullins and Kayo, made, of course, in Germany. I have never been able to look at this without thinking how great it is, and also wondering what other figures there might have been in the same series. One Guess would be Winnie Winkle and Perry Winkle. On the lower left is a delicate German bisque ashtray of that coupling, and the matching ashtray, on the right, from the same series. It shows Moon and Kayo in the same pose as the large figure above. Here too, are a pair of pairs of Moon and Kayo bath salts containers. These were also made in Germany, most likely, by the same company as the ashtrays; the excellent quality of the sculpture is the same.



Stepping back to get a better look at the whole case, and, beginning on the left, is the Playstone Funnies “Kasting Kit”. This set could be expanded endlessly by purchasing additional rubber molds to use in kasting plaster effigies of all one’s favorite Komic Karacters. In front of that, is a bisque figure from the Nodder universe. It is a medium sized Snowflake, by Oscar Hitt (again). Next to him, a German Mickey McGuire calendar. One must change the paper numbers on the lamppost, every day. On either side of them, and just behind, are a pair of heavy cardboard jointed figures of Moon and Kayo. And, in-between, is the Skipper and the Toonerville Trolley as a toothbrush holder. This is Japanese bisque. Moving along, is a cast iron Toonerville Trolley, and one cast in pot metal, as well as the original box for the cast iron toy. Out in front, is a German bisque of Perry Winkle, also related to the Noddors. He has a moveable hat.



On the back wall, is a rare unpunched premium sheet of Funny Paper Puppets. Then a pair of Kayo suspenders, with an animated, hat tipping, display card. Below that, is a jointed cardboard figure of Ed Wynn as "The Fire Chief." Then, wood jointed figures of Moon and Kayo, and behind them, a jointed generic "Mouse"! Part of the set, because they couldn't get Mickey. Then, an oilcloth doll of Smitty, a very rare Sparkplug sand pail, and, in the corner, a nearly disjointed wood doll of Joe Palooka, who looks like he's been dazed. In the background is the introductory set of the first 12 Comic Noddies circa 1928. We will, soon, see them better.

MUTT & JEFF

At every toy show and flea market I attended, as well as at my house, Mutt and Jeff seemed to be always hanging around. There is something universally compelling about them, these predecessors to Stan and Ollie, Bud and Lou, Dean and Jerry, Bert and Ernie, and all of those, who, through the years, joined the parade of buddies, that was begun, and led, by Mutt and Jeff. Mutt and Jeff were created by Bud Fisher, in 1907. And they brought him fame and fortune. How famous did he become? He was the first big celebrity among Comic artists, and he even got his own cigar, a cigar named after him. Now that is BIG!



Mutt and Jeff became the first successful daily strip, and set a trend that has continued to this day. Numerous artists lent their talent to drawing the strip, including I just learned, according to Wikipedia, my friend Maurice Sendak, when he was still in high school. The strip continued until 1982. A cartoonist named, Al Smith drew it for nearly 50 years, under the name Bud Fisher, until Bud Fishers death in 1954.

Collecting Mutt and Jeff, with the exception of the tin windup toy, was easy, in the beginning. Not many wanted them, apart from me. That's the kind of thing that I like best. A lot of assorted Mutts and Jeffs fit nicely into this small showcase, but they get bigger, and turn up, all over the place.



In the very back of the showcase, is a box from Mutt and Jeff Cigars. In front of that, are two Swiss jointed dolls by Bucherer. And in the center, is an unrelated item, a tower of nine King Features Characters, inscribed "A Polar Lark," celebrating the expedition to the North Pole in 1926. Jiggs and Maggie, Barney Google and Sparkplug, Fritz, Krazy Kat, Abbie the Agent, Polly's Pop and Annie Rooney are there, as well.

On either side, are composition figures of Mutt and Jeff with noses that wiggle on springs. Fanning out from there, are a delightful and rare pair of colored china vases with Mutt and Jeff's names emblazoned on them. Then, there are identical sets of Candy containers on both sides. On the left, are the classic standard plaster statues of Mutt and Jeff, a pair of glazed salt and pepper shakers in the shape of the early non-nodding Noddies, and a curious pair of figures with their

mouths open, designed to emit smoke, when lit cigarette butts are places in their ... derrieres. On the right are a very early pair of bisques, bordering on fine china, and a pair of Mutt and Jeff, cast in pink celluloid. And, in the two back corners, are a pair of wooden dancing figures.

Mutt and Jeff always came in sets, but here is Mutt on his own, as he was when the strip first began, on this label for "Mutt brand Oranges". Look closer! Jeff is there as well. Can you detect him? As the label says: He's "not much for looks, but Ripe, Sweet and Juicy!" This is so subtly surreal!



Here is a curious pair of dolls. I have come across these many times. For some reason, Mutt's fez is always sewn in place and Jeff's, which is a separate piece, is always missing. This is the only set I have ever seen, complete.



We have seen the dolls, below, already, in the back of a showcase, along with Foxy Grandpa. I believe they are quite extraordinary, and deserve a proper portrait on the page with Mutt and Jeff. These are obviously very early. Mutt and Jeff were created 100 years ago. I could believe these dolls, too, are nearly that old. The fabric, which is on the brink of disintegrating, is true to the characters. Their mustaches are actually animal fur. Mutt's has lost its hair. These dolls are very complicated, and no expense has been spared to render the characters, as



This large imposing pair of statues is interesting. Here are the comic characters, Mutt and Jeff, as they would look if they were human. It has always been my "intuitive" belief that these do not portray Mutt and Jeff, as they were known on the printed page, but, rather, they might be portraits of the live actors, who recreated them on the stage.



Here they are on this 1912 sheet music, the actors who portrayed Mutt and Jeff on Broadway. The makeup is quite incredible!

MUTT AND JEFF

MARCH AND TWO-STEP



By
GEO. H.
DIAMOND



COMPOSER OF
"THERE'S A MOTHER
OLD & GREY WHO
NEEDS ME NOW"



Copyrighted 1912 by Drane and Alexander.

DRANE & ALEXANDER
THE ORIGINAL MUTT & JEFF OF THE NESTOR CO
IMPERSONATING MUTT & JEFF



In the hallway is a poster that was always something of a mystery: it speaks of a Mutt and Jeff cartoon in color with full orchestra. I often wondered when that could have been, and how it was done? Now, thanks to the internet, some answers are at hand. A Google search dates the movie at 1925, and reveals that it was reissued in 1930, using a process called, "Kromocolor", with a sound effects and music track.

SCREEN ATTRACTIONS CORPORATION
Presents

MUTT and JEFF

by
Bud Fisher
in

"MIXING in MEXICO"

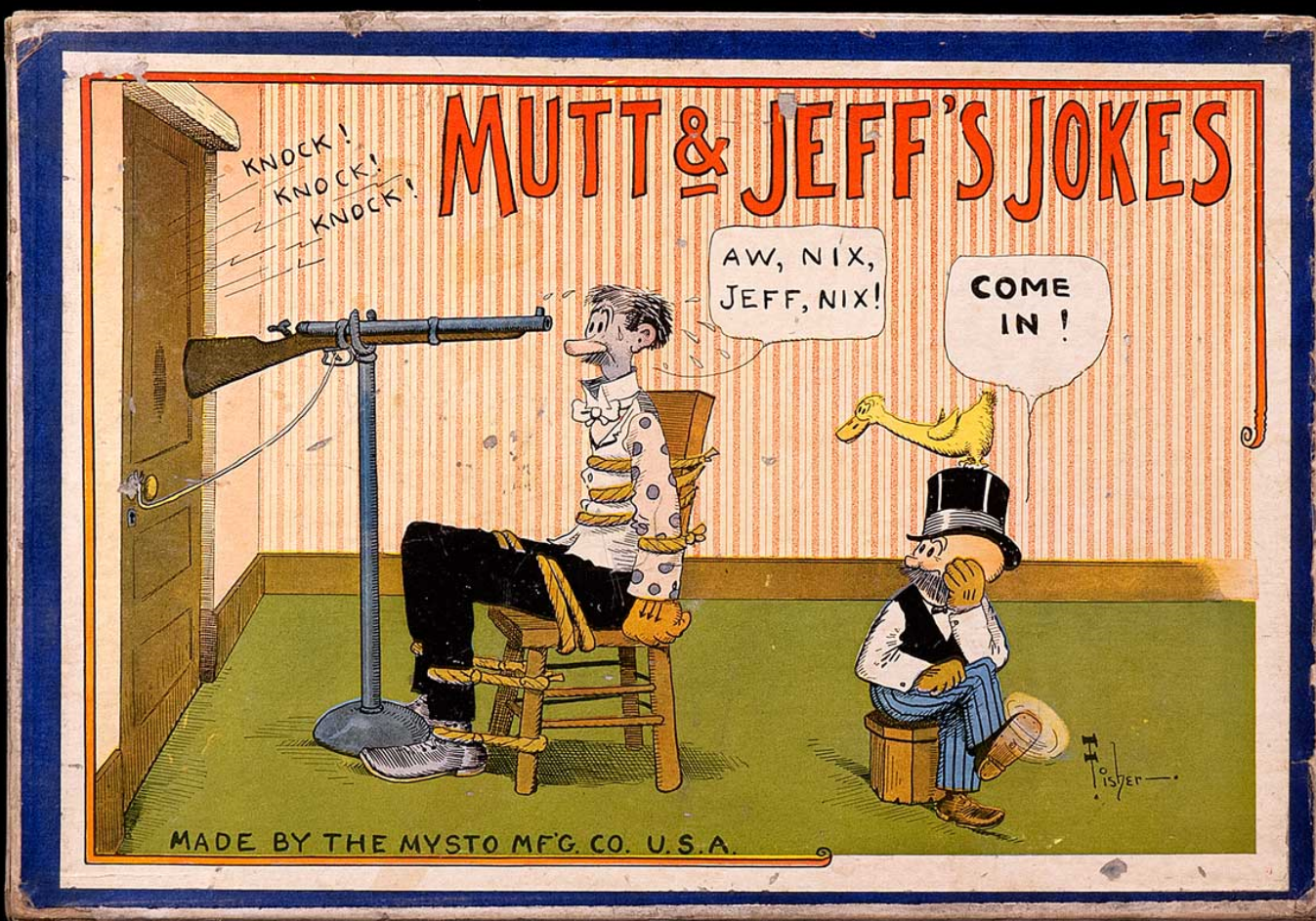
WE'RE
NOW SET TO
SYMPHONIC
MUSIC

AND PRESENTED IN
NATURAL
COLOR



LITHO IN U.S.A.

One of my very favorite Mutt and Jeff items is this “Joke Set,” Mutt and Jeff’s Jokes.” It is full of generic tricks and novelties, as well as elements with Mutt and Jeff content, made especially for the set. The cover is delightful and colorful. It was a Miracle to find this set complete! The instruction sheet is here, as well as every gag that it explains. How delicious! It is like a box of fancy chocolates, with every piece in place. What are the chances of a miracle like this ever turning up again?



This Mutt and Jeff Harmonica was made in Germany in 1923. Harmonicas were once a popular format for applying a licensed character's name. Only the most famous Comic Characters got their names on cigars, harmonicas, and razor blades. This example has very nice engraving on the case, which shows up dramatically when the light is right. I am tempted to open another showcase and fish out another item by Bud Fisher...



... this interesting Optical Toy. It was a giveaway at the Gem Theater in Clinton, N.C. "Where the Pictures are Always Good". I hope they were better than this. The images are barely discernible, but the figures are, clearly, Mutt and Jeff.

Another item that I keep on my desk, is this. Mutt and Jeff are just hanging out. There appears to be a bottle of Champaign, chilling, at Mutt's feet. The feet of his chair, I mean; his actual feet are on the table.

This curious object is most likely made out of pot metal or bronze. It was cutting it was made





MUTT

JEFF

The last collectible I bought from my friend "Ted Hake's Americana" was a spectacular pair of statues of Mutt and Jeff, above. They are so big, so imposing that I never found a place to put them. Therefore, they still sit on the floor, where Ted and his friends, who delivered them, in person, set them down. I've grown accustomed to seeing them there, almost, as if, they belong there. Actually they deserve a pedestal and a spotlight. That might not ever happen in my lifetime.

Here is an old photograph from the July 1912 issue of Playthings Magazine. It shows the same figures, minus the painted patina, which may or may not be original, on display in a store window. When I first began collecting, I often visited the New York Library Annex to gaze at back issues of Playthings and Toy and Hobby Magazine. The highlights were always photos of store windows. Even on the printed page they are windows back in time, and one can drink them in, and get lost in them, like a kid (in a time machine) with Christmas, a few days away.

64

PLAYTHINGS

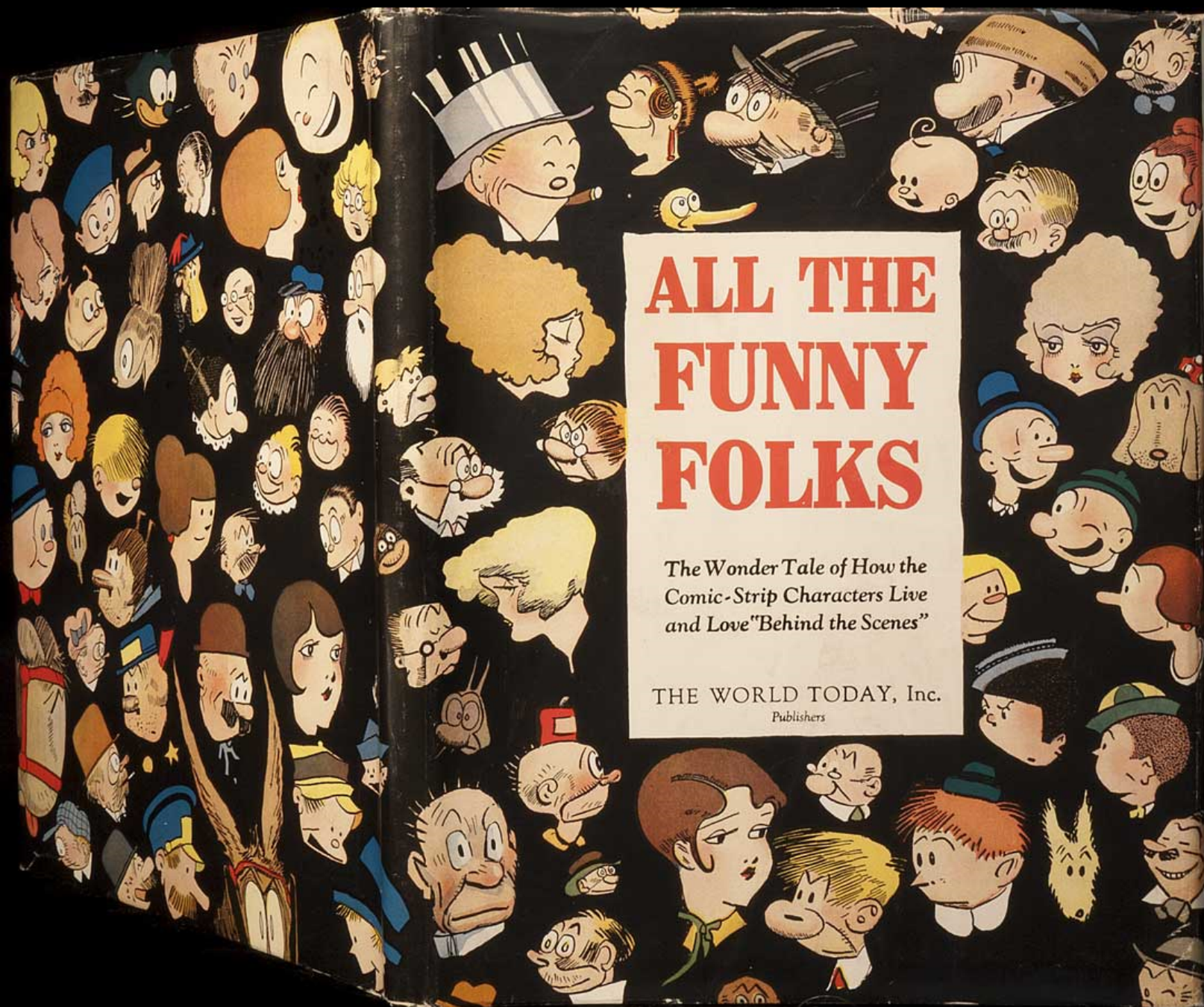
July, 1912



MOVING PICTURES IN THE TOY WINDOW

BIEDERMANN

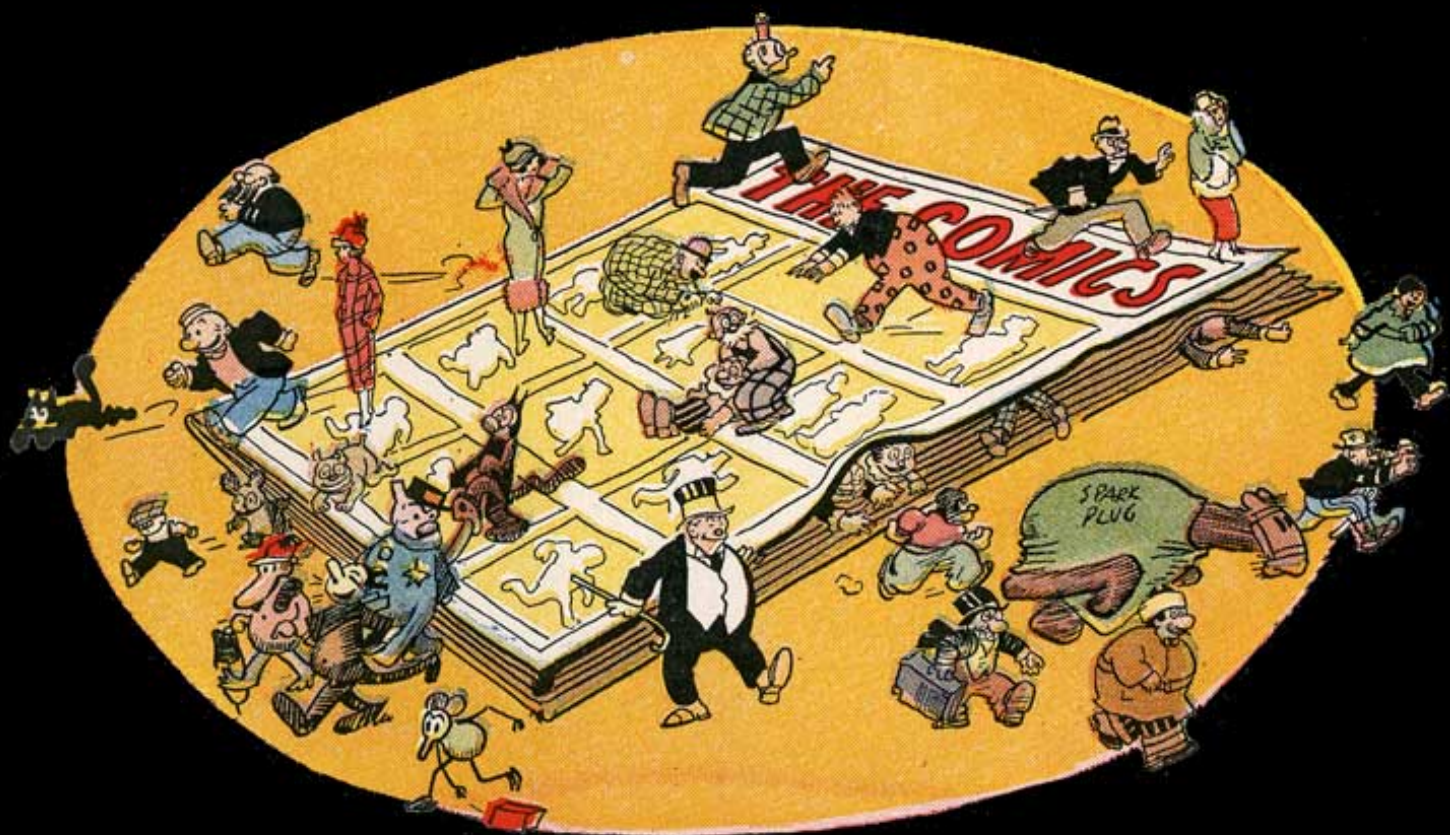
When I began my Journey in Search of Comic Character Imagery in "The Land of Before My Time Began" I had no idea where I was going. I was sailing into uncharted waters. And then, I came across a Map! It was in the form of a curious volume, a sort of book for children, written in rhyme, with adult sophistication. Between its colorful covers, were almost all the old time Comic Characters. It was, in fact, a kind of a compendium of all the folks who used to live in the pages of the Funny Papers, and, when it was written, in 1926, still did. Yes, All The Funny Folks were there. That was, in fact, its title, "All The Funny Folks". Each character, although, vastly different in styling and appearance, was beautifully realized with all its individual visual Characteristics and idiosyncrasies intact. And, at the same time, they were harmonious and unified, because they were all drawn by one man. His name was Louis Biedermann.



For all of you who have not ever seen the dust jacket, this is what the end flaps say:

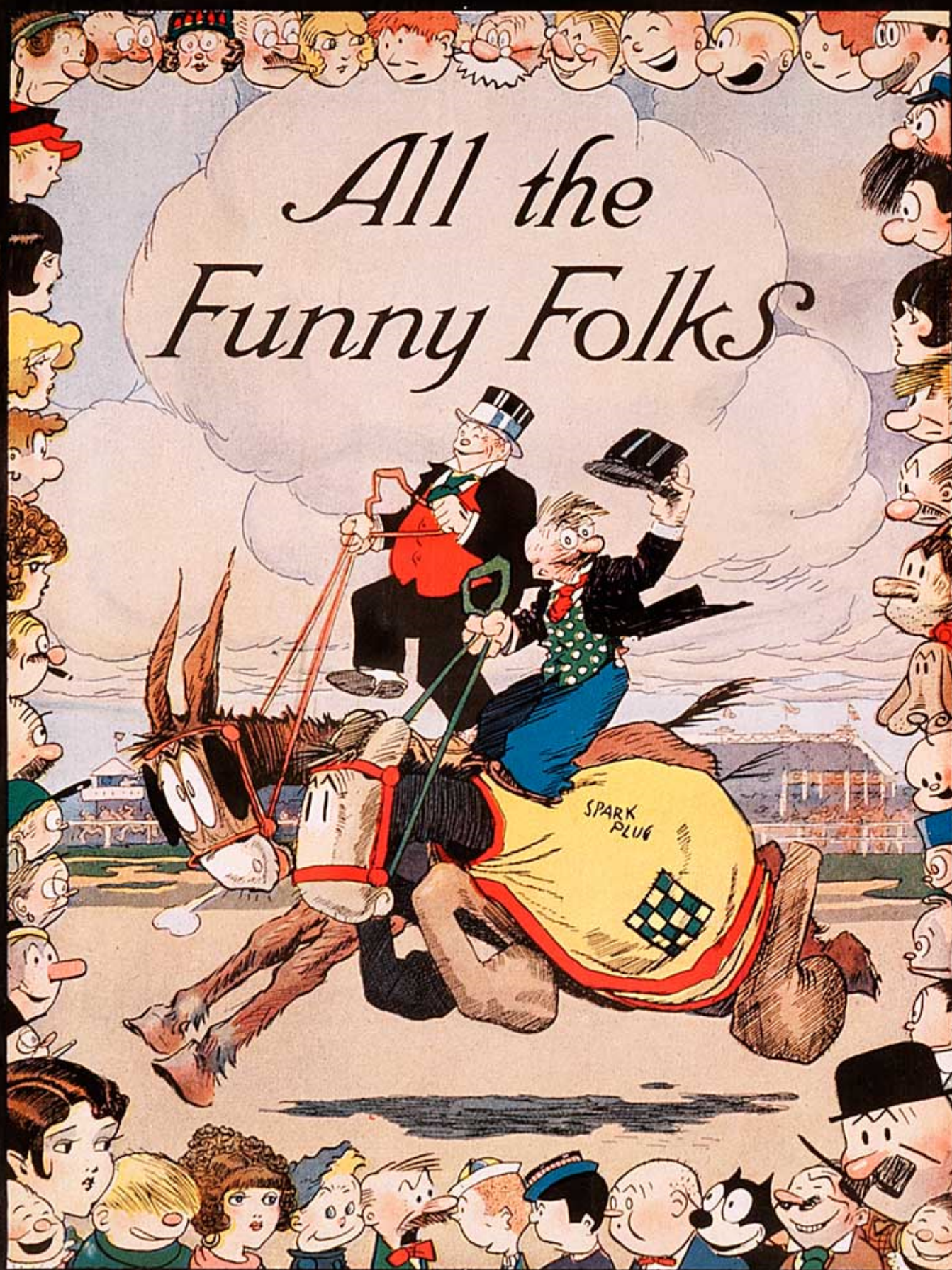
STEP RIGHT THIS WAY > Ladee-ee-s and gen'lemen! on the inside, The Greatest Show on Earth. A gigantic gathering of all the famous stars of all the famous funnies. You know them - you have seen them - you have laughed at them, each and all, but never before have you had the chance to see them all together in one Brobdingnagian, Tremendous, Huge, Marvelous, Comic Circus. See the great race for love and honor between Maud and Sparky, between Jiggs and Google! See all the Immortals of the "Funnies" as they live at home, in the Land of Fun. Greatest Show on Earth, On the Inside, first time gathered together anywhere. Performance now going on. STEP RIGHT THIS WAY! >

In every artistic line there are STARS. One by one, here or there, they step out of mediocrity, past competitors, and the light of genius blazes upon them. Now and then, some bold and adventurous impresario gathers together a number of such stars and creates unusual interest with an "All-Star" cast. Between the covers of this book have been assembled, for the first time, ALL THE STARS of all the Star Comic Pages amusingly dramatized in verse and prose into a plot in which they mingle, love, live, match wits, in the mythical realm of comedy, the Land of Fun. You know them all. You love them all. Here they are All



The more I studied this unusual book, the more incredible it began to look. It had everything, everything my time at Pratt, studying illustration, prepared me to appreciate. The realization that this tour de force of illustrative excellence was created in 1926, was amazing to me. Each page radiated visual virtuosity. There were vignettes of powerful simplicity, and complex crowd scenes of mind boggling complexity, and the final pages presented all the leading luminaries of the Sunday Funnies in one enormous wedding party that continues beyond the borders of the book, itself, to extend over many pages. I actually managed to obtain several copies for the express purpose of joining all these final pages together to form one long panorama. I never did. Even though, I had enough spare books to do it, I couldn't bring myself to cut them up. By the way, the story was written by Jack Lait, and illustrated by Louis Biedermann. Both their names are nearly impossible to find. They are printed in small pale type, and hidden on a page with the copyrights.

All the Funny Folks



Louis Biedermann was a full time artist on the staff of Pulitzer's "World". One spectacular example of his work appears on line, several times. Unfortunately, the image is always small. Apparently, when this fantastic vision of the New York City of the future appeared, it was spread across two full pages of the paper. It shows Louis Biedermann to be a man of soaring vision, and boundless imagination. Entering the world of Comic Characters might have been a step down for him. On the other hand, his realistic renderings of real locations are reminiscent of the days before cameras were invented, when artists had a practical purpose, before the time of "self-expression." That purpose, then, was to make visible that which there were no cameras to record.



That's sort of what he did in *All the Funny Folks*, made visible a mythical world, in which all the vastly divergent Comic Characters live together, comfortably. Louis Biedermann was an artist, not a cartoonist. He brought an artist's eye to the task of illustrating a book, in which all the funny folks participate. I could believe it was an assignment handed to him by his publisher. For King Features Syndicate had a vested interest in promoting its stable of Comic Characters.

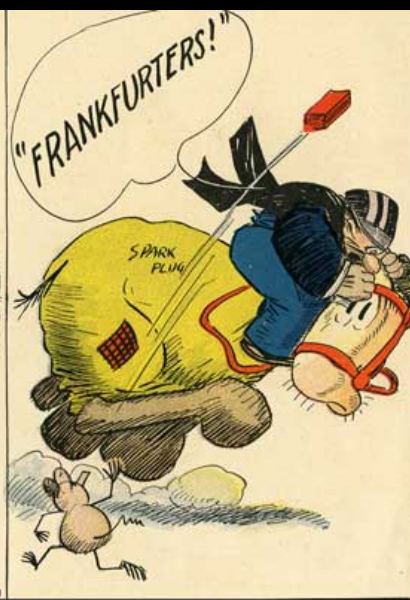
Having learned illustration in the days when art was prepared "camera ready", it's mind boggling for me to appreciate the awesomeness of how this book was made. The art was entirely done in black and white and all the colors were later stripped in mechanically. Thus, the colors were not mixed with paint, or even seen. They had to be calculated using various percentages of dotted screens.



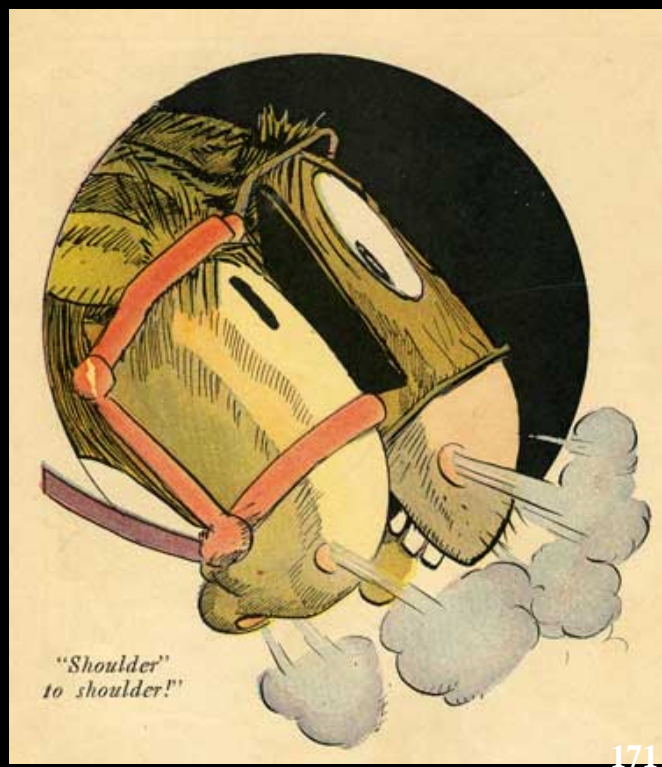
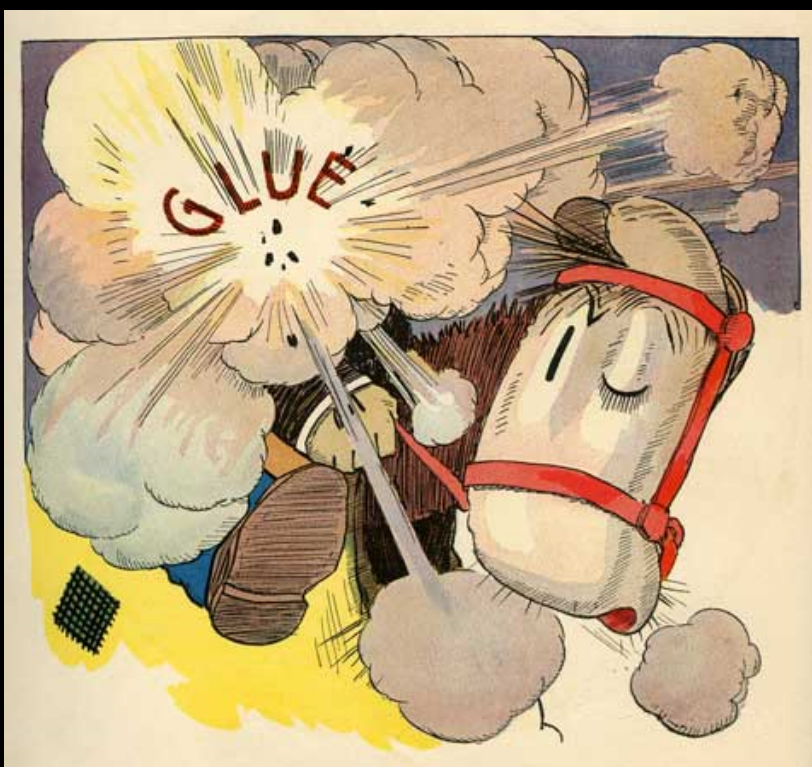
When Biedermann lent his artists eye to Comic Characters, extraordinary things took place. The highlight of the story is a race, a contest between Jiggs, riding Maud the mule, and Barney Google, riding Sparkplug. Reference is made to the very windup toy we'll see, a little later on.

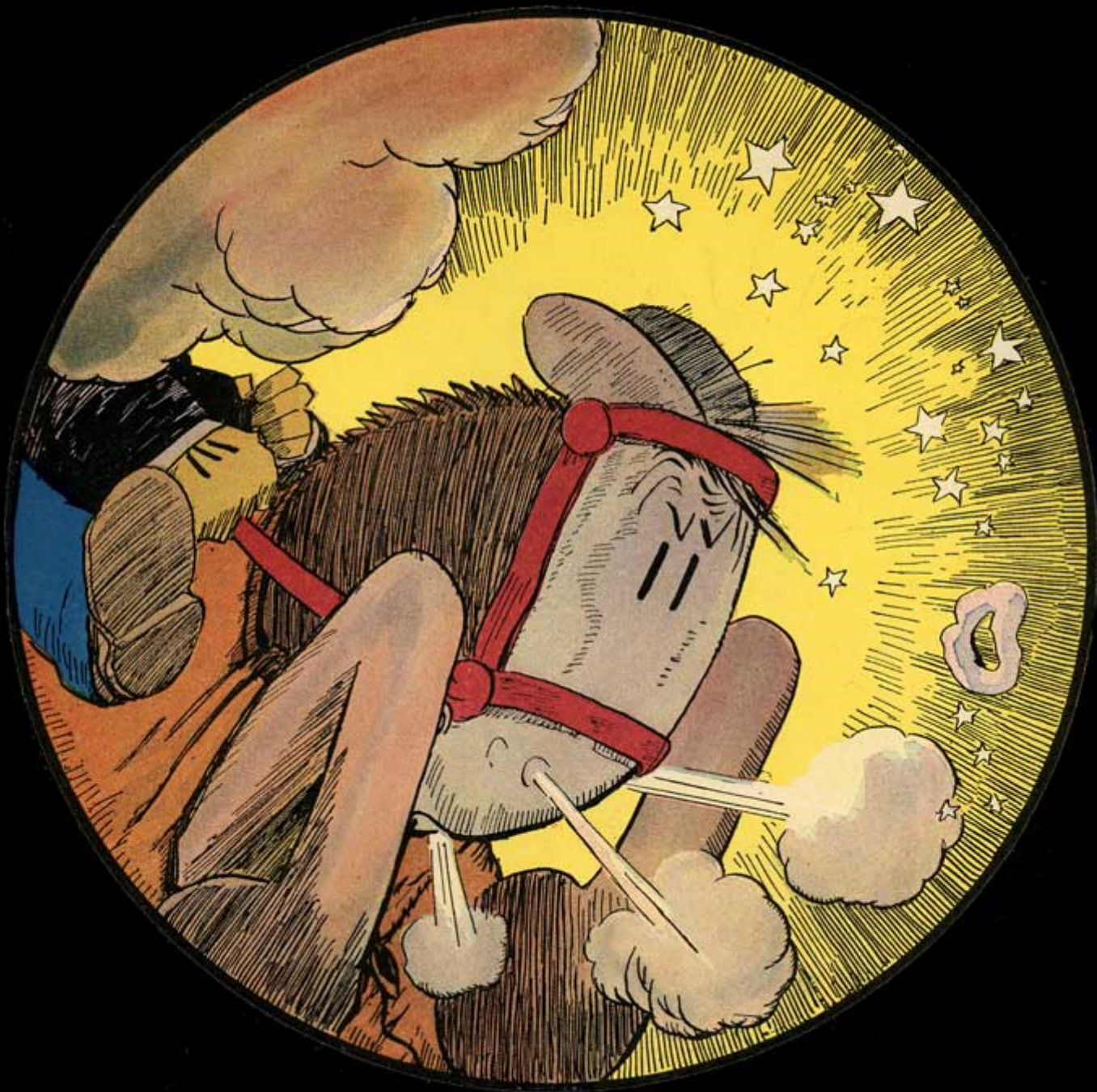
Sparky's gait was more like that of one of those mechanical toys, wound up to hit the floor and

jump, hit the floor and jump again; his four feet came down together and



Biedermann brings the race to life, over several chapters, using every cinematic device he can muster. And, incredibly, the race turns out to be exciting, with grandiose scenes, like this one that one can study repeatedly, for the audience is a virtual Who's Who in the World of Comic Characters. And stunning, vignettes, like those, below, magnify minute details of the action.





So, you might be asking what all this has to do with collecting. It would appear that when Biedermann drew *All the Funny Folks*, in 1926, he carved himself a niche, producing annual Calendars for King Features Syndicate. These are incredibly rare, today. And only two years have been discovered to date. I have the only known example of the 1928 Calendar. But before we look at that, and the Calendar he did in 1926, here is another calendar that is similar, dating from two years earlier, not done by him.

Clearly, this is King Features' annual calendar, imprinted with the name of a hardware store. It would appear to be a clever way of paying for the cost of printing an elaborate calendar each year, and giving it away free. Simply sell it for use by other business, as well, and imprint their name. So, I am convinced that this is actually the King Features Calendar for 1924, as it looked before Louis Biedermann created *All the Funny Folks*, and God knows how many Comic Calendars in the years that followed. Like the Biedermann variation of this format that is to come four years later, there is a series of comic strips, below, to be torn off, one a week, to show the dates. Only one is missing, here. The first one that remains is for the week of January 6, 1924. The art at the top features assorted vignettes of King Features stable of characters, unimaginatively displayed.



THE HEDGES-ATKINS SUPPLY CO.

THE HOUSE OF QUALITY

1834-1836 BLAKE STREET

DENVER, COLORADO

1924

JANUARY

1924

SUNDAY
6

MONDAY
7

TUESDAY
8

WEDNESDAY
9

THURSDAY
10

FRIDAY
11

SATURDAY
12

KRAZY KAT By Herriman



The first Biedermann Calendar I obtained was the one for 1928. The format is the same as the one above. Even the green paper border is the same. The thing that is spectacular about this is the large elaborate scene that features all the Funny Folks, as only Biedermann can handle them, and a wheel that turns to reveal scenes of Comic Characters, traveling around the World. The full color art is badly faded, but the secret scenes on the rotating wheel, inside, are bright. This rarity has always been one of my favorite things. I got it from Ted Hake in 1970.

ALL THE STARS ALL THE TIME THEY'RE STARS

AROUND THE WORLD WITH THE FUNNY FOLKS

Comic Calendar

1928



↑
MOVE
DISC
UP-
WARD

Compliments of

241 West 58th Street

M. KOENIGSBERG, PRESIDENT

New York City

INTERNATIONAL NEWS SERVICE
UNIVERSAL SERVICE
INTERNATIONAL FEATURE SERVICE
NEWSPAPER FEATURE SERVICE
PREMIER SYNDICATE
INTERNATIONAL ILLUSTRATED NEWS
STAR ADORF

JANUARY

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
22	23	24	25	26	27	28

Barney Google and Spark Plug—By Billy DeBeck

Thursday—Michigan Admission Day

YESTERDAY AFTERNOON BARNEY WENT ON A TOUR OF INSPECTION THROUGH THE DAIRY AND WAS DISMAYED BY THE NUMBER OF COWS HE SAW. EACH COW HAD HER OWN INDIVIDUAL SPOTLESS STALL AND OVER EACH WAS A SHINY BRASS PLATE. "ONE READ, JERSEY," ANOTHER "GUERNSEY," OTHERS "AYR SHIRE" AND BARNEY DIRECTED THAT ALL THE SIGNS BE TAKEN DOWN BECAUSE THE NAMES WERE TOO HARD TO PRONOUNCE. NOW, MOST OF THE COWS HAVE NEW BRASS PLATES OVER THEIR STALLS AND EVERY ONE OF THEM READS "BOSSY."

I CAN SEE VAN HORN NEVER SPENT ANY TIME ON A FARM WHEN HE WAS A BOY! IMAGINE MILKING COWS BY ELECTRICITY!!! HALF THE FUN OF BEING ON A FARM IS GETTING UP AT THE CRACK OF DAWN, GOING OUT TO THE SHED TO MILK THE COWS AND LISTEN TO THE CATS MEOW!

THERE! THAT'S ALL SET!! I'LL BEAT THOSE GUNS TO IT AND HAVE HALF THE COWS MILKED BEFORE THEY GET A CHANCE TO TURN ON THE ELECTRIC SWITCH

FIVE A.M.

What? What? What? IN--?

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Years later, I got another Biedermann Calendar from Ted, as well. This one is for 1926. So, it doesn't require Sherlock Holmes to deduce that there were more. Obviously, there was a new one every year up to the early 1930s. This 1926 Calendar is one of two examples known. It consists of four sheets, each with an incredibly complex scene of all the Comic Characters, doing various activities in Summer, Fall, Winter, and Spring. I have eliminated the large area below that shows the dates for three months each, for the sake of saving space.



Copyright, 1925, King Features Syndicate, Inc.

ALL THE STARS ALL THE TIME THEY'RE STARS



Copyright, 1925, King Features Syndicate, Inc.

ALL THE STARS ALL THE TIME THEY'RE STARS



Copyright, 1935, King Features Syndicate, Inc.

ALL THE STARS ALL THE TIME THEY'RE STARS



Copyright, 1925, King Features Syndicate, Inc.

ALL THE STARS ALL THE TIME THEY'RE STARS

I believe, just these two spectacular Calendars, alone, due to their rarity and visual virtuosity merit a page on this website. But it gets better!

Several years ago, auctioneer, Rick Opfer, turned up five panels of badly damaged original Biedermann art. It was, obviously, created for a King Features Calendar that no one, I know, has ever seen. They were mind blowing! At least, they blew mine, due to, among other things, their size. They are enormous, 30" X 40"! And done in pen and ink with breathtaking virtuosity.

One can surmise, that the calendar, for which they were intended, was to have had 12 pages, each depicting the Comic Characters in a different country, as they traveled around the World. They were expensive in the auction, but I got the four I wanted. I let the other go, as it was a scene in China and Happy Hooligan was the only known Comic Character featured, the rest were crowds of anonymous Chinese. I bid over the phone, and got these!

At some point they were in a flood. There is a water line across the bottom of each. Perhaps the other seven scenes were destroyed. It is certainly tantalizing, speculating what countries they might have been. In all of these, Biedermann displays his exuberance and ability for drawing scenery and architecture, beautifully. Then he populates the scenes with Comic Characters.

We can date the year that these were done, quite accurately, as 1930. In January of that year, King Features licensed Mickey Mouse. And each of these four scenes includes the newly arrived Mickey. We see him racing through the streets of a European city, with Felix. It is clear that Louis has not quite firmed up his take on Mickey; check out those giant ears! The city pictured might be Copenhagen, Brussels, or maybe Amsterdam. Alas, there here is no way of telling, without the calendar at hand. How I would love to see it!

The second depicts what is, no doubt, a familiar landmark, alas, not one familiar to me. At some point, I was convinced that this was Cape Town South Africa. You might notice that Bonzo is also in the scene, and some Grace Drayton characters, from Dolly Dimples and Pussycat Princess. One ponderous issue, a minor detail, or perhaps indication that this art was never used, is the fact that the black area of Mickey's head has never been completely inked in.

The third appears to take place in Mexico, judging from the local costumes. There is an obviously known Building, high on a hill, rendered in Biedermann's best illustrative style. The situation is exciting. A giant Parrot? is making off with Hans and Fritz who have been tied up. The Captain and Mama Katzenjammer pursue them in a plane, wielding a grappling hook. Down below, Felix is in a panic. What's going on here is something that will never be explained.

Last, is an event in Argentina. A group of dancers perform for an audience of Comic Characters, as only Biedermann can render them. Mickey is all ears, while Bonzo appears to have had one drink too many.

I have gathered all the copy here, ahead of the images, so that a full panel can be devoted to each one.









I drove to PA to pick these up. Rick brought them to one of Noel's auctions for me. Once they were framed, there was only one place to hang them, and that is on the chimney in the big room. Alas, I have to remove them in the winter when I light the potbellied stove. But, on special occasions, I hang them up again, just for the evening. In the warm months of spring and summer they stay up full time, and bask in the glow of an orange light bulb. It seems like that chimney, the only place in the house that was still empty, was waiting for them to arrive.



I sometimes sit, for hours, gazing at these, while contemplating Biedermann and the King Features Comic Calendar. It is a reverie that I enjoy. I like to speculate about them. I know, for certain, others existed, as I have collected the scant evidence. What would the missing ones be like? What were the other countries on the World Tour that these four panels of art depict? When I got them they were on the brink of disintegrating, sort of like the Dead Sea Scrolls. I deacidified the paper before I framed them, hoping that will save them. Will I ever see the others? Or were they destroyed? Surely there are more calendars out there. The missing years; how many were there? Any day, one could appear, as I sit here, waiting for Biedermann.



JIGGS & MAGGIE

George McManus created “Bringing Up Father,” generally referred to as “Jiggs and Maggie,” in 1913. Jiggs was an Irish emigrant who came into wealth by winning the Sweepstakes. In spite of that, he still preferred the company of his old gang of rough working class friends. His social-climbing wife, Maggie, on the other hand, hoped to rise in High Society. Her unending efforts to thwart Jigg's attempts to hang out with the boys, down at Dinty Moore's, were often implemented by a rolling pin.



McManus's Early strips were rich in Art Nouveau and Art Deco elegance. The wood carving, above, done in the era, captures a bit of that. This element was all but gone from Bringing up Father when I encountered the strip, years later, as a kid. And after McManus's death in 1954, the sheer delight of its design, largely disappeared. The story and characters continued, in other artist's hands, until Bringing Up Father's 87 year run came to an end in 2000.

Bringing up Father was syndicated internationally by King Features. It immediately soared to national popularity, and the products it generated were surprising in their quantity, considering the adult nature of its theme, an ongoing domestic squabble. But Jigs and Maggie won over kids and adults, alike, and generated a lot of merchandise; much of which can be seen in the showcase, below.

In 1904, nine years before Jiggs and Maggie, McManus had created the first American family strip, "The Newlyweds." It featured a young couple and their baby "Snookums." Snookums gained a certain popularity, and images of him soon appeared in the form of toys, dolls and decorative novelties. A selection of those artifacts share this "George McManus Showcase," along with Jiggs and Maggie.



Beginning in the center, we discover two fabulous wood carvings of Jiggs and Maggie. Clearly, they were a labor of love, created in the era, by an unknown carver, who admired the characters greatly. So much of the essence of the strip itself is here, from the rolling pin, held delicately in Maggie's hand, to little Fifi, Maggie's dog, led on a gold chain by Jiggs. The seated figures, on either side of Fifi, are porcelain containers, made in Germany, as were most of the objects in this case.

Hovering above their heads, is an object that I like a lot, an effigy of Jiggs carved from a coconut. The red hair is not added on; it is shredded from the shell, itself. To the left, are the Schoenhut Jiggs and Maggie dolls in their original presentation box. The paper masks on the walls are Einson Freeman giveaways. There were three of these in the Bringing Up Father set. Dinty Morre, on the left, is especially hard to get. In the very corner, next to him, is a fabulous Jiggs container made out of wood. Inside it hide a dozen or more tiny figures of many of the popular Comic Characters. They, too, are carved of wood. Then there are two stuffed velvet dogs, who may, or may not, be Fifi.

As a pair of Swiss jointed Bucherer dolls look on, a crowd of bisque and china figurines gather to admire an exceedingly rare toy. One that is, quite possibly, the only example known. There is a windup car, that, as early tin toys go, has become iconic. It is a toy in all respects identical to this, called "Jiggs in His Jazz Car." But, this vehicle, according to its copyright date, preceded Jiggs in his Jazz Car by a year. The difference is in what is written on the trunk. Where the words "in his Jazz Car" would, ordinarily appear, it says "GOODBYE MAGGIE", here! This is the "Goodbye Maggie Car!"



In the photo above, you'll also see a delicate pair of figurines, made in Japan. They display a sensitivity that is not often seen in objects crafted in the West. Note the gentle folds of Maggie's silken dress and the pattern, subtle, yet complex, painted with finesse. Jigs raises his crystal glass, in a toast to Maggie's elegance.

To the right of the big case is a charming figurine of Jiggs and Maggie embracing. The ever-present rolling pin is put away. Next to that is a complex and beautifully crafted doll of Jiggs. Here also is the hand held version of the tin toy of Jiggs and Maggie battling, which I removed so you could better see the following photo of Snookum's domain.



It seems, the public never tired of seeing Snookum's funny face. Among this gathering are three inkwells, an ashtray, an eggcup, a flask, and other assorted figurines, many of which have nodding heads. Balanced on a fulcrum, they are intended to keep moving. In the background, is an elegant tin lithographed container that features scenes of the Newlyweds family life. In the far corner, is an early Snookums doll, and a very early painted tin windup of Snookums that is extremely ugly! Whoops! Sorry, I mean: what an adorable baby!

One category of objects that, through no fault of its own, has fallen from a state of grace to indirectly be banished from America, forever, and, along with novelty ashtrays and fancy table lighters, will never see the light of day again, is Smoking Stands! In their heyday smoking stands, especially those that were homemade, were a popular home workshop project. And many of the designs depicted Comic Characters. They were often based on patterns that appeared, for just that purpose, in magazines and newspapers.

During the Depression smoking stands became a kind of cottage industry. And some enterprising craftsmen virtually manufactured them at home, as a means of self-expression, or just to make ends meet. Anyone who collected these, in the early flea market daze, could always count on one thing: No matter how nice the one you liked enough to purchase was, today, a better one would always come along, tomorrow. Thus, after my first outburst of exuberance, I learned to be more cautious, and tried to choose designs, so well done that they would not become prematurely obsolete. The only pair of Jiggs and Maggie Smoking Stands, which I have not seen outdone, so far, are these. In spite of the fact that they are primitive, they, nonetheless, possess a certain style and elegance.



Here is another home crafts project, done with such skill and taste that it transcends the commonplace. With the exception of the Bakelite handles, every aspect of this object was hand made. The image was impeccably wood burned into the tray, then skillfully painted. And the images were also hand painted on the glasses. The imagery on the tray echoes the touches of Art Deco that characterized McManus's early days. And the image of Jiggs bears an eerie resemblance to the photograph of George McManus, himself, attired as Jiggs, that appears on Wikipedia, today.



I can't look at this extraordinary creation without vividly recalling the uproar my acquisition of it raised. At a flea market, there is no tougher competition than a husband and wife team, both running through the field with equal intensity, looking for the same stuff as me. As one of the major Brimfield markets was opening I waited politely and patiently as the wife of one such team, who had raced to a potentially good booth, seconds ahead of me, carefully examined everything. When she was finally leaving, I asked her if she was finished looking. She answered to the affirmative, without thanking me for waiting, and began walking away. From some 30 feet away, she glanced back to see me calmly walking over to the station wagon and picking up this tray which had been sitting on the rack, in plain view, all along. She came running back, hysterical! And created an illogical scene. And when the dealer brought out the matching set of glasses, adding insult to injury, she "lost it" completely. It took all day for her husband to calm her down again. After which, we all went out to eat.

Jiggs and Maggie, like many of the early Comic Characters, appeared on the stage. This large poster that decorates the hallway is advertising the first production. It was simply called "Bringing Up Father" and opened on Broadway in 1914. There were several additional stage productions in the years that followed, "Bringing Up Father in Florida", "Bringing Up Father Abroad," etc. One of the last in 1925, was not successful. Apparently, the story was interrupted by acts from vaudeville.

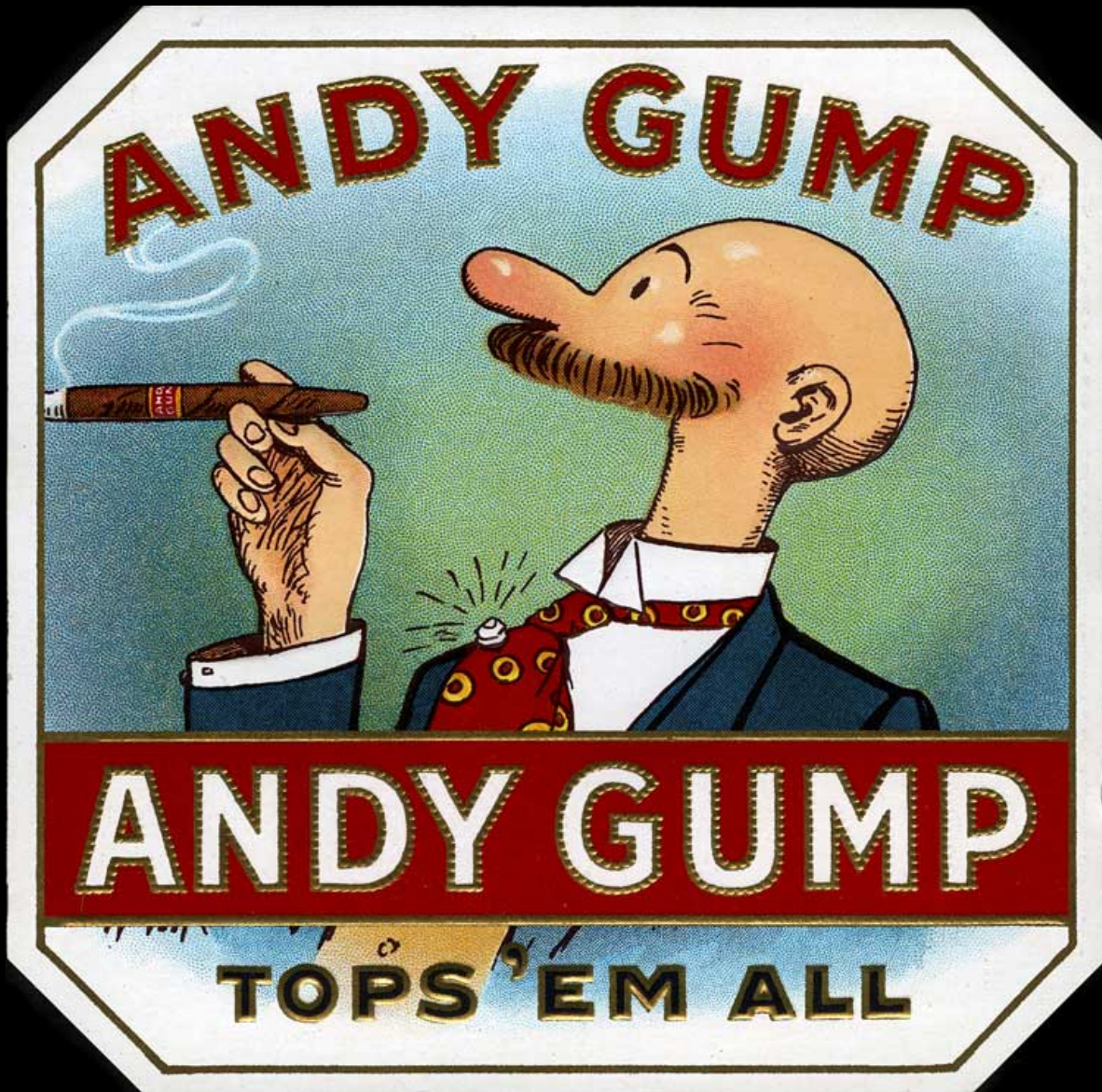


This page turned out to be more work than I imagined. I have one final photograph remaining, the main showcase, seen from a different angle. I like these low angled compositions. Although, they do not display every single item clearly, they are more dramatic, and feel more like being there in person. So I will add this final photo, as a means of summing it all up, and then, call it a day. Tomorrow, I will move on to Andy Gump.

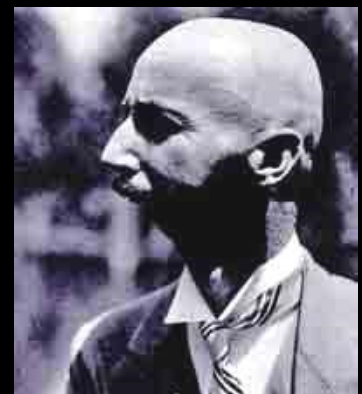


ANDY GUMP

"The Gumps" was created by Sidney Smith in 1917. The idea for a strip about an ordinary middle class family was conceived by Joseph Patterson, editor and publisher of the Chicago Tribune. He hired Smith to write and draw The Gumps. Up until then, Smith had been drawing a talking animal strip of his own, about a Billy goat named Old Doc Yak. Overnight, Doc Yak moved out of town, and left his house, and even his car, "Old 348", behind. The paper showed the house sitting vacant for a day. And on the following one, the Gump Family moved in to stay. They remained there for the next 42 years



Researching dates on Wikipedia, today, I discovered a wild story from a 1937 issue of Life Magazine, claiming that Smith based the character of Andy Gump on a man named Andy Wheat, who actually had no lower jaw. Apparently, there is some dispute as to whether this is true, or false. But it is true that Wheat, who later changed his name to Gump, like Andy Gump, himself had a wife named Min and a son named Chester, and even an Uncle Bim! What is also indisputable, is the fact that Andy Wheat did bear an uncanny resemblance to Andy Gump, especially, around the chin.



A detailed display of Andy Gump merchandise. The background features a large cutout of Andy Gump in a dark blue suit and red tie, standing with hands on hips. To his right is a white statue of Andy Gump at a podium, holding a fan. Above the statue is a record player with a vinyl record that says "HE WEARS NO MAN'S COLLAR 100% for the PEOPLE ANDY GUMP FOR PRESIDENT". To the right of the record player is a movie poster for "THE MOVIES" featuring Andy Gump and the text "PRICE 25c". In the foreground, there are various small figurines, including a green one with a large head, a white one with a large head, and a small one with a large head. There is also a small table with a red top and a black base. The entire display is set against a backdrop of a large cutout of Andy Gump in a suit and a large cutout of a movie poster for "THE MOVIES".

The central figure in this case, a plaster statue of Andy Gump, might well be the only one. It is exceedingly well done, depicting Andy as President of the “Husbands Union.” Chained to the podium is a volume, titled the “Book of Rules.” He holds a gavel in his hand. This sculpture is simple and elegant, and in the eyes of some, myself included, is possibly the most beautifully executed representation of Andy Gump there is.

Standing tall, to the left of him, is another nicely realized image, the Andy Gump Jigger. This sizeable contrivance was intended to stand on a windup phonograph, and, through a complex mechanism, animate the figure to create the illusion that Andy is dancing to the music. The base is cast iron and very heavy. On the right side of the showcase, is the Swiss jointed Bucherer doll of Andy. This is one of the rarest of the comic figures that they manufactured. Around here, somewhere, I have the original brochure that shows the many poses he can take. God knows where it is. Some of the things, remaining in the case really should be removed to be appreciated, the bank, in front, especially. It is an elegant object in every respect. I see that time and tarnish have dimmed its beauty. Let's take it out, and let it shine again!

This concept is both clever and frustrating. It was intended to encourage children to save money. When they had saved \$5 in the tin lithographed bank, they could take the handsomely decorated canister to the real bank, and open it with a can opener, and, at the same time, open their own savings account with the bank. In exchange for doing that, they would be given this spectacular pot metal/pewter bank. I believe there was a way to hide what was left of their tin bank, inside. Certainly, no collector would want to do that. The tin lithography of Andy on the front, and the Gump family on the back is too nice to hide. The metal bank is elegantly understated, and calculated to convey a sense of security, with Andy on one side, and wealthy Uncle Bim on the other, guarding your money.





This card, which is also a 78 RPM record, was part of Andy's Presidential Campaign. It is a compelling piece of political memorabilia. I love quaint curios, that most would be inclined to throw away. There is something hopeful about the fact that trifles like this have survived. They offer proof that there are still people in the World who cherish, seemingly insignificant things.

Here is a rather large mirror, similar to a pin back mirror. It is advertising Andy Gump for President. I'd vote for him in a heartbeat. His catchy slogan was: "He wears no man's collar."

The next item is "over the top". Absolutely mind boggling! I don't know how such a thing can even exist. Fully endorsed by Sidney Smith, it is both disturbing and fascinating. It operates on the same, not so secret, principle as the famous Johnson Smith & Company Mystery Pig. It is called, "The Movies," because it does! Here is the envelope it comes in, the object itself, and below them, the actual ad from Johnson Smith. I'll let you drink in all the deliciously revolting details for yourself. For now, it sits here silently, and I hope empty. If I ever finish the 60 pages of this website, I might come back and put an electronic fly, inside.



"THE MOVIES"

PRICE

25c.



Licensed By Sidney Smith Corp.
Movie Principle, Patents Pending

INSTRUCTIONS

S-s-h! Don't tell! Lift one end of the stick-tape and put in a good lively fly or bug—that's what we did. Put in two or three—the more the merrier! Let them out at night to have their dinner and exercise, and get more lively ones in the morning.

Mystify Your Friends!

Sole Manufacturer

H. P. KEELER COMPANY

612 Loop End Bldg., CHICAGO, U. S. A.



Every
Mischievous
Boy
Will Want
The
MYSTERIOUS
ANDY GUMP
MOVIES



JUST PUT
A
LIVE FLY
IN
AND
WATCH
THE
RESULT

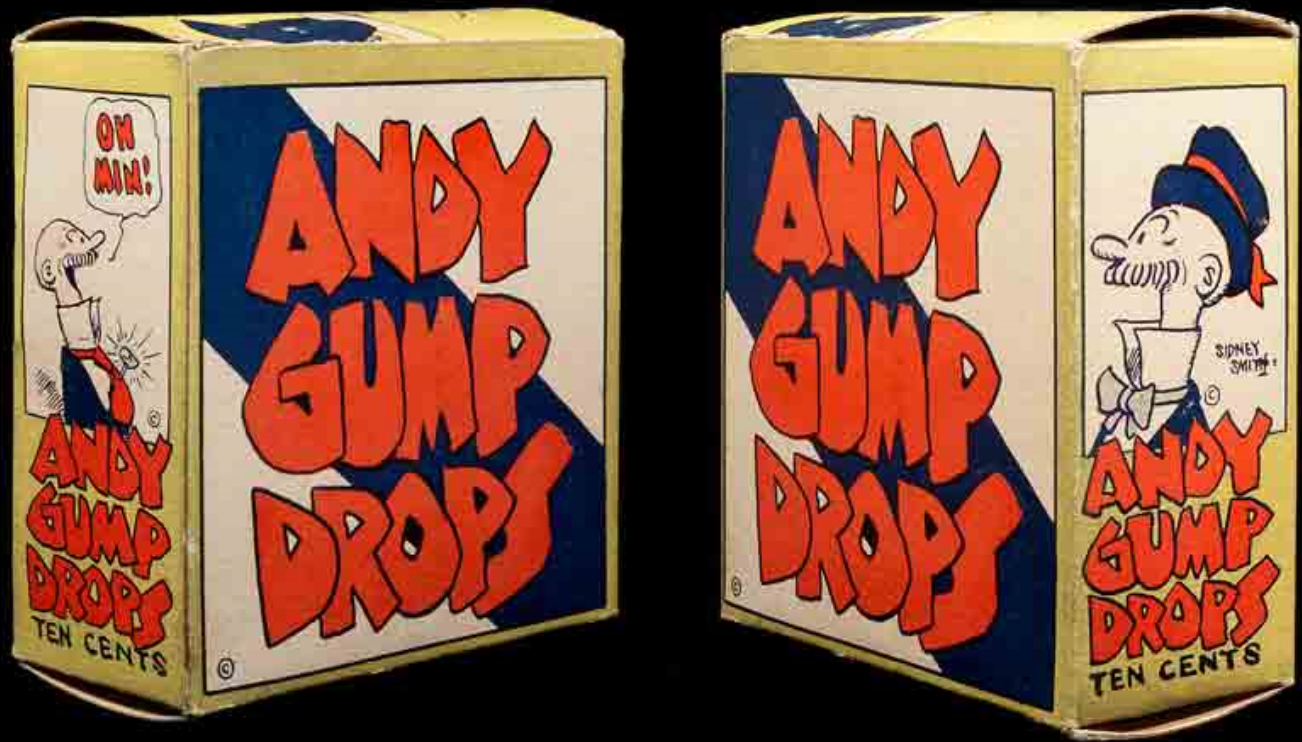
MYSTERIOUS

S-S-S-H! DON'T TELL. It's a secret. Everyone is baffled as to how it works or why the well known Andy Gump winks his eyes, wiggles his ears or twitches his mustache with an indeterminate mysterious movement. But YOU know, for all you have to do is to catch a good lively fly or bug and put him inside, and then the fun begins. Put in two or three—the more the merrier. Let them out at night to have their dinner and exercise and get more lively ones in the morning. MYSTIFY your friends. Have them wondering as to the cause of the mysterious movements. But don't tell the secret. Keep them guessing. For there is no machinery inside and it is NOT electricity, NOT air, NOT radio, NOT vibration, NOT light rays. There is more fun to be had with the ANDY GUMP MOVIES than a barrel of monkeys. Every mischievous boy (and that means most boys) will want one. But remember—don't tell the secret to anyone else.

MYSTERIOUS

No. 3311. MYSTERIOUS ANDY GUMP MOVIES. PRICE POSTPAID. 30 cents

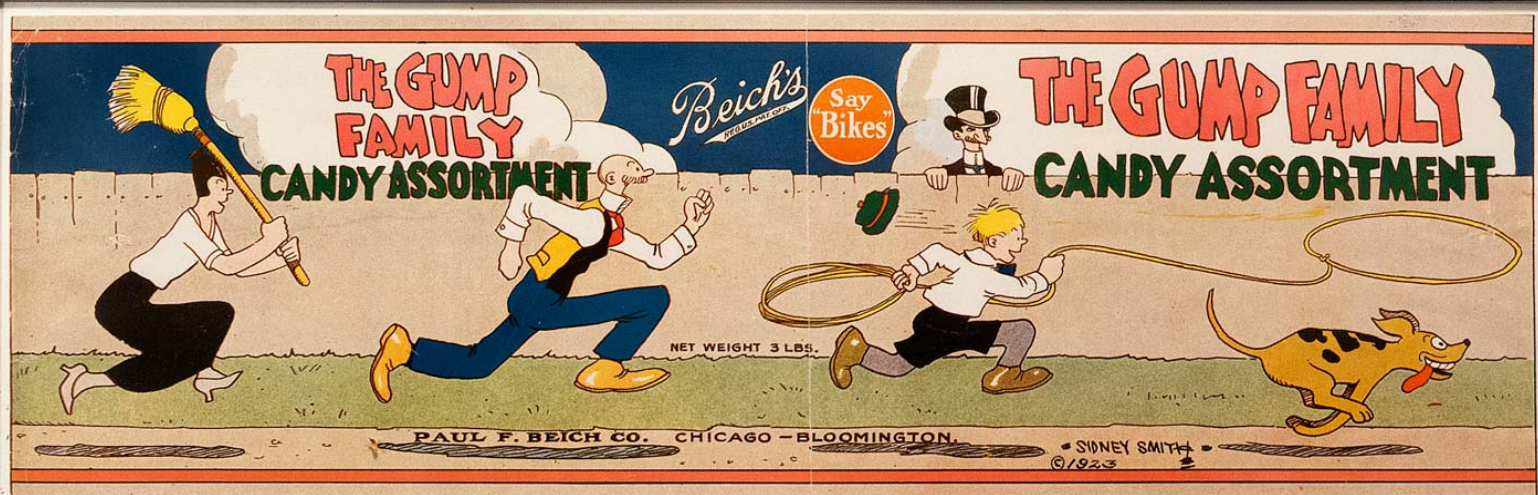
This is the box that contained a dime supply of “Andy Gump Drops”, another fragile artifact that has survived the ravages of time.



And here is one of many in the series of Sunshine Andy Gump Biscuits boxes. Andy proclaims “Boys and girls, Here’s lots of Sunshine.” These biscuits shaped like Andy and his family and others like them, in the form of licensed Characters were clever variations on the ever popular “Animal Crackers.”



This sweeping panorama of the Gump Family, chasing after Buck is actually a wrapper designed to encircle a three pound round canister of Gump Family Candy. It is dated 1923. A “bullet” that reads, “Say Bikes”, teaches how to pronounce the candy company’s name.



This set of die-cut paper figures (the folding bases are still inside the box, unused) is one of my favorite items. It is so peripheral! How many of these might still exist. I would like to think there was a similar set for every cast of Comic Characters, but something tells me this is it, because the company that made it is simply called "The Andy Gump Company". I can think of no better example than this, of what is typical of Collecting Comic Characters. Unlike objects made of fine china, precious metals, or rare gems, the things that Comic Character Collectors like best are "valuable," today, solely, because they tended to be thrown away, and considered valueless, in their day.



If the Gumps could ever be credited with creating a Classic Toy, it would be this, the Arcade Andy Gump cast iron 348 Roadster. The very indestructability of this heavy cast iron vehicle made its paint extremely vulnerable. Every brief outing, on a concrete sidewalk, left its mark upon the paint. There is something so basic and iconic about this toy that it implies that every Comic Character Collection must include one. This, and the Popeye motorcycle are the only two cast iron toys that made their way into mine. Seeking one in pristine condition was too expensive a game for me to play. I waited, until the one that seemed just good enough, not great, came my way. The paint was not too bad, neither was the price; in fact, it was amazingly reasonable, considering that it came from the legendary toy dealer/collector, Frank Whitson.



Now, if you are ready, let's get in Old 348 and head just down the highway to Gasoline Alley. We'll find a smaller version of this there, included in a set of vehicles, known as the "Tootsietoy Funnies."

GASOLINE ALLEY

I was slow to appreciate the greatness of Gasoline Alley. The products that the strip generated were relatively few, compared to the likes of Felix and Mickey, etc. And what there was appeared, to me, to be whispering. It all seemed so polite and sweet, and the level of stylization was not extreme. It was not until I finally examined some of the Gasoline Alley Sunday Pages that I tuned in to the understated genius of Frank King. I was amazed to realize that many of these Sunday pages are excursions into Surreal Fantasy. Such flights of fancy were to be expected in Slumberland, but they are stunning when encountered in what purported to be reality.

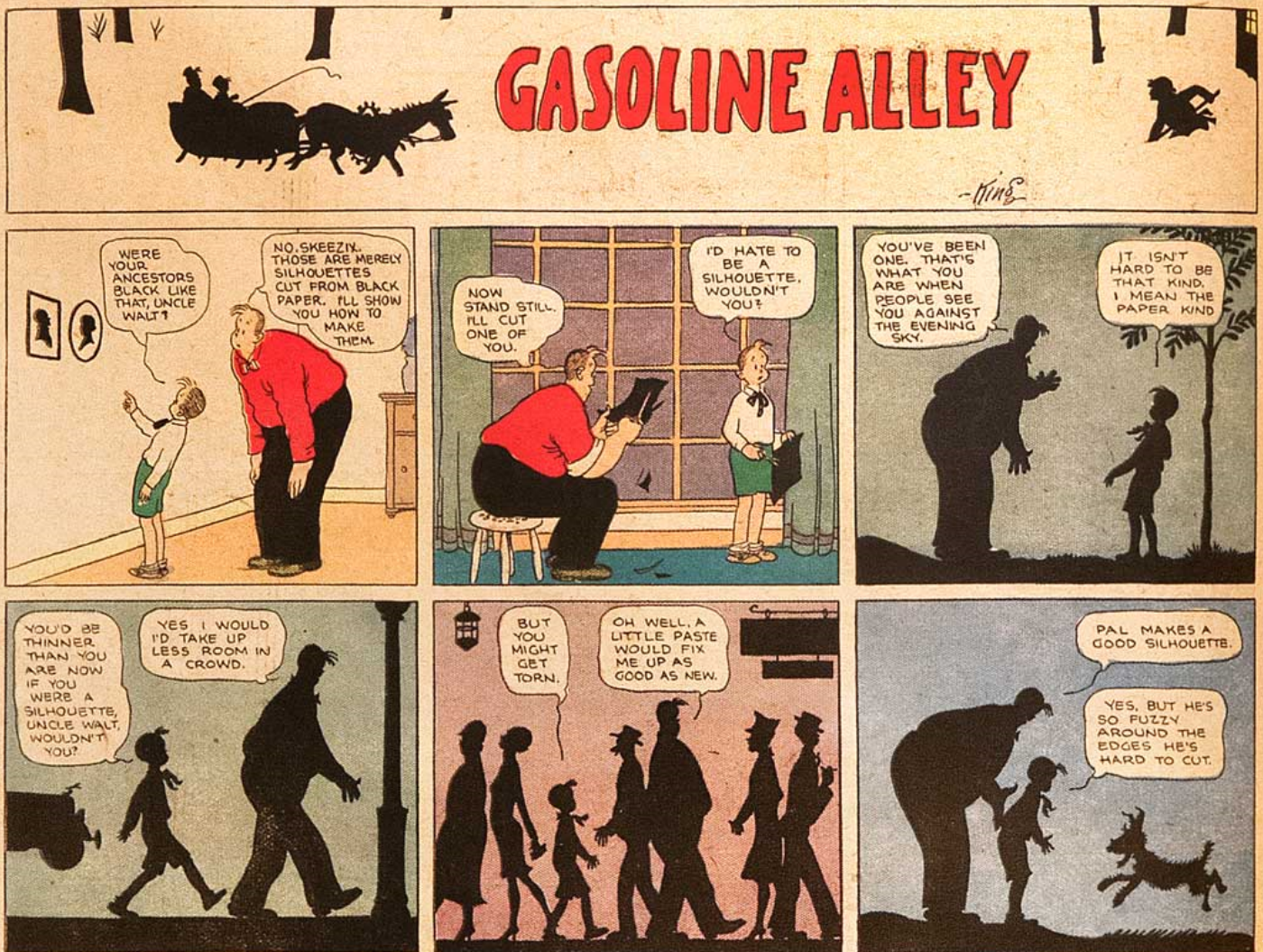
The last thing that I intended to do here was to reproduce any comic pages, but in this case I would like to share a few with you. I discovered hundreds of original Sunday Funnies, at the local flea market, many years ago, and getting to know Uncle Walt and Skeezix turned out to be one of the things that made acquiring them exciting. I don't quite know how to copy these. I also have a bound volume of the same strips in a smaller size, perhaps that will be easier.

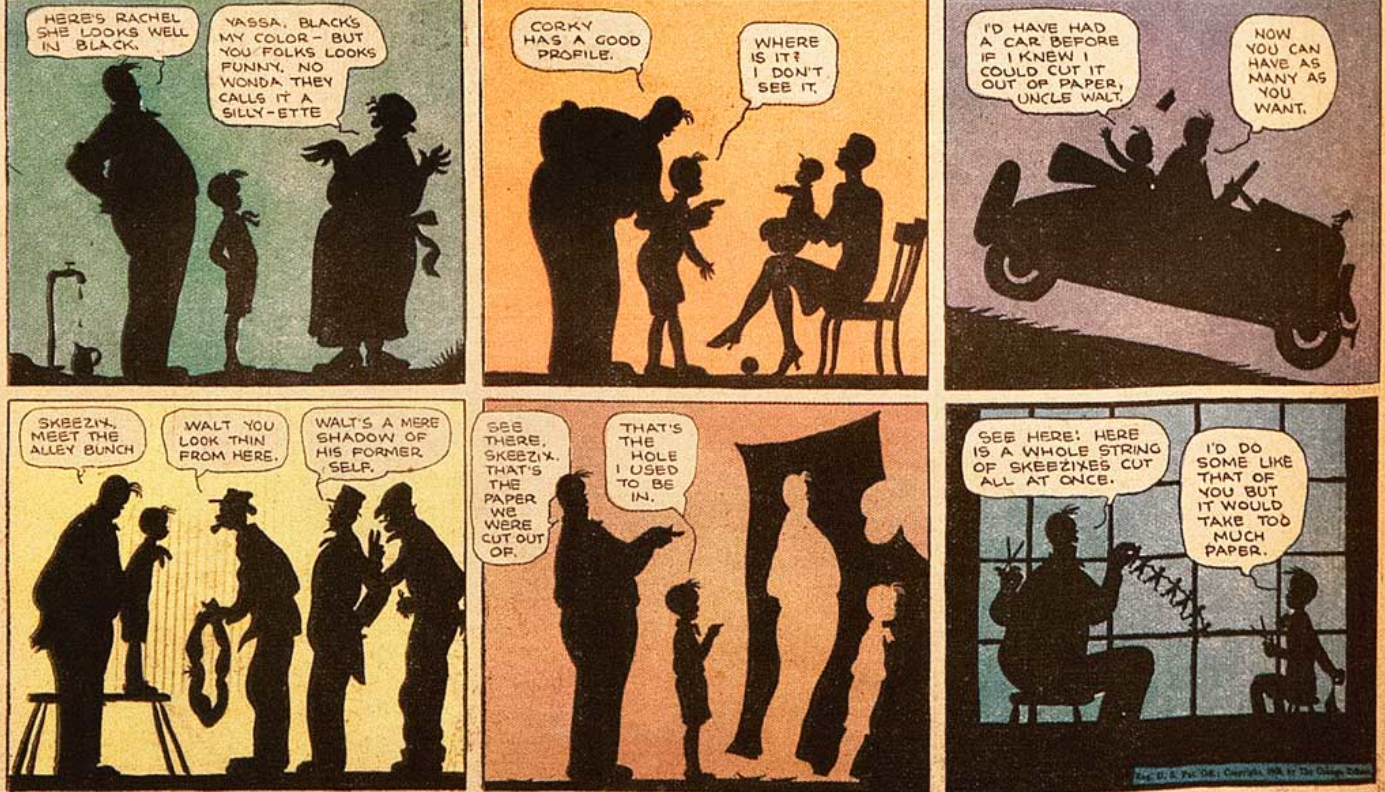
In the first, Uncle Walt and Skeezix become silhouettes. Or do they? Walt points out that one becomes a silhouette, "when people see them against the evening sky." And so, we travel with them among their friends and discover how powerfully distinctive and recognizable the shadows of the characters in this strip really are, and we wonder if this is really happening, or it is just a conversation, until they encounter the sheet of paper, from which they, themselves, were cut out. And then, we segue inconspicuously into reality again, or do we? That is what I find so amazing about this quiet strip, the line between reality and fantasy is crossed gently, seamlessly, and with great subtlety, time and again.

Comic Section

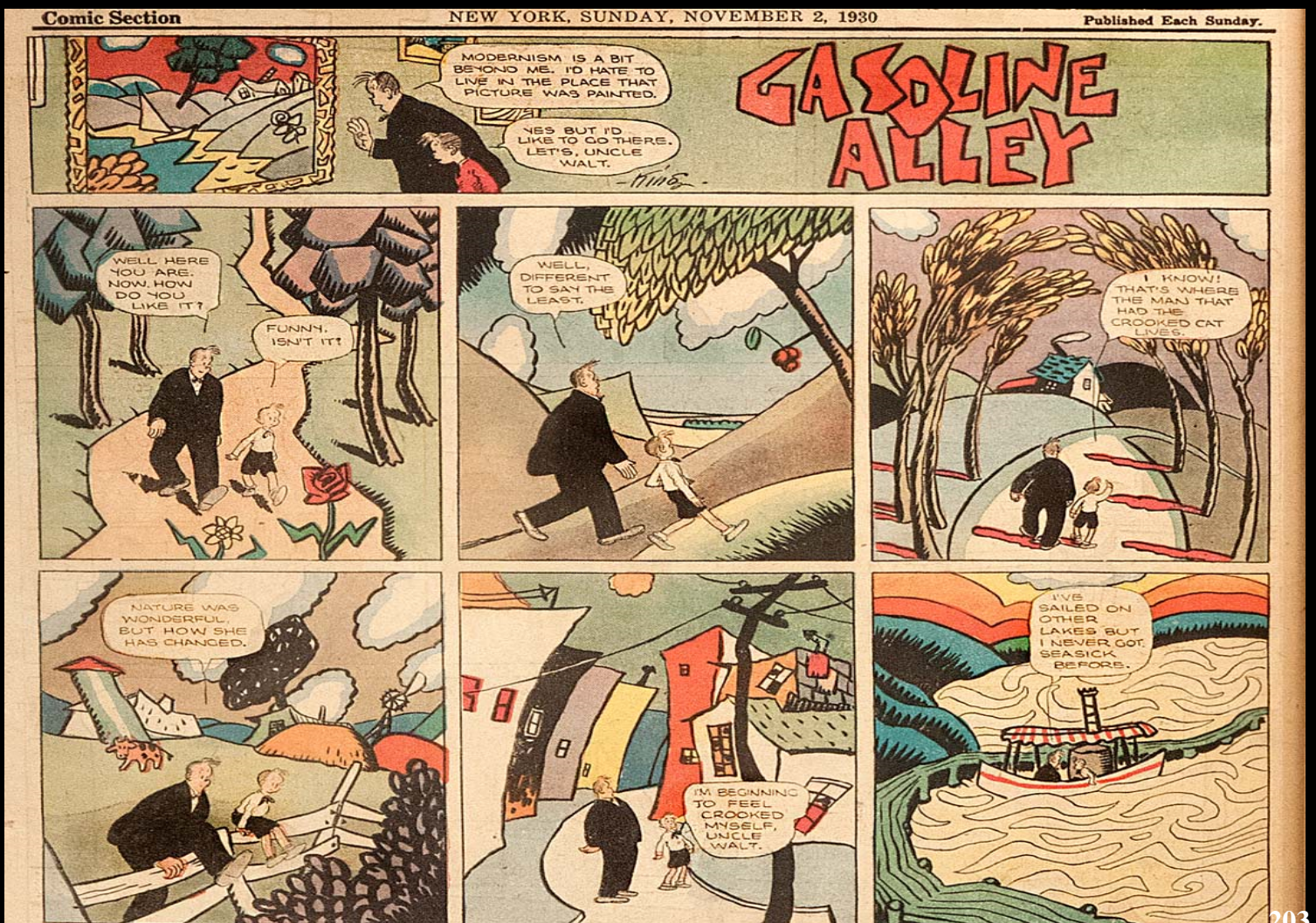
New York, Sunday, DECEMBER 2, 1928

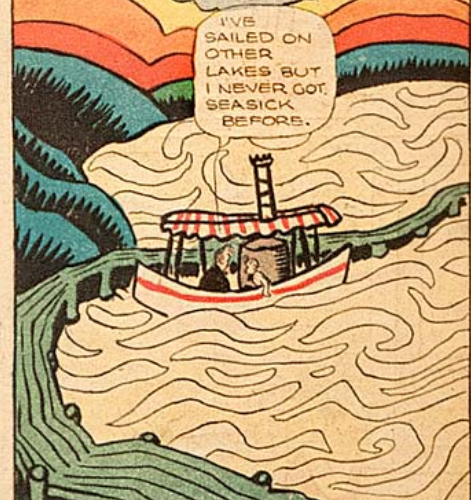
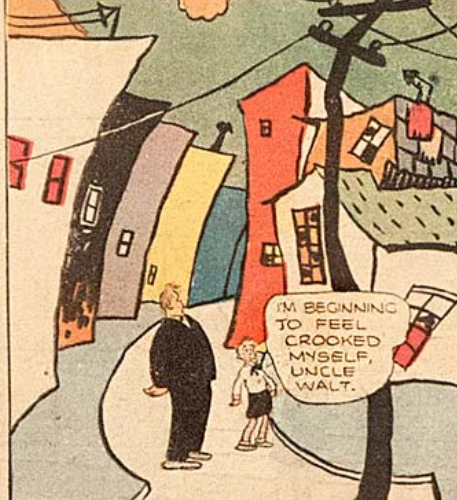
Published Each Sunday.





Walt and Skeeze take a stroll through the abstract world of Modern Art. Skeeze, in the last panel, offers the suggestion that it might have been a dream, then takes it back, again. They leave a trail of paint behind. Uncle Walt is, now, over 110 years old, and Skeeze is just 92.

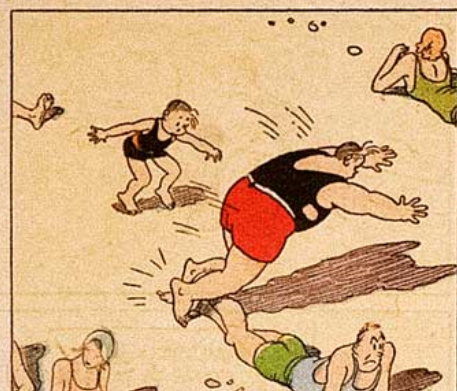
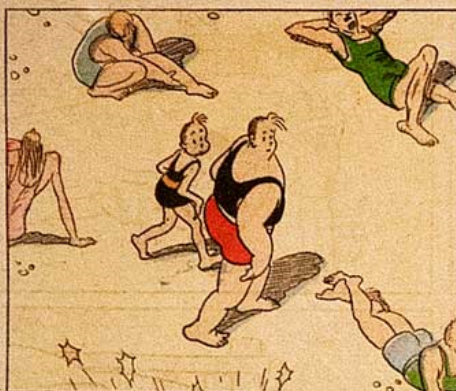


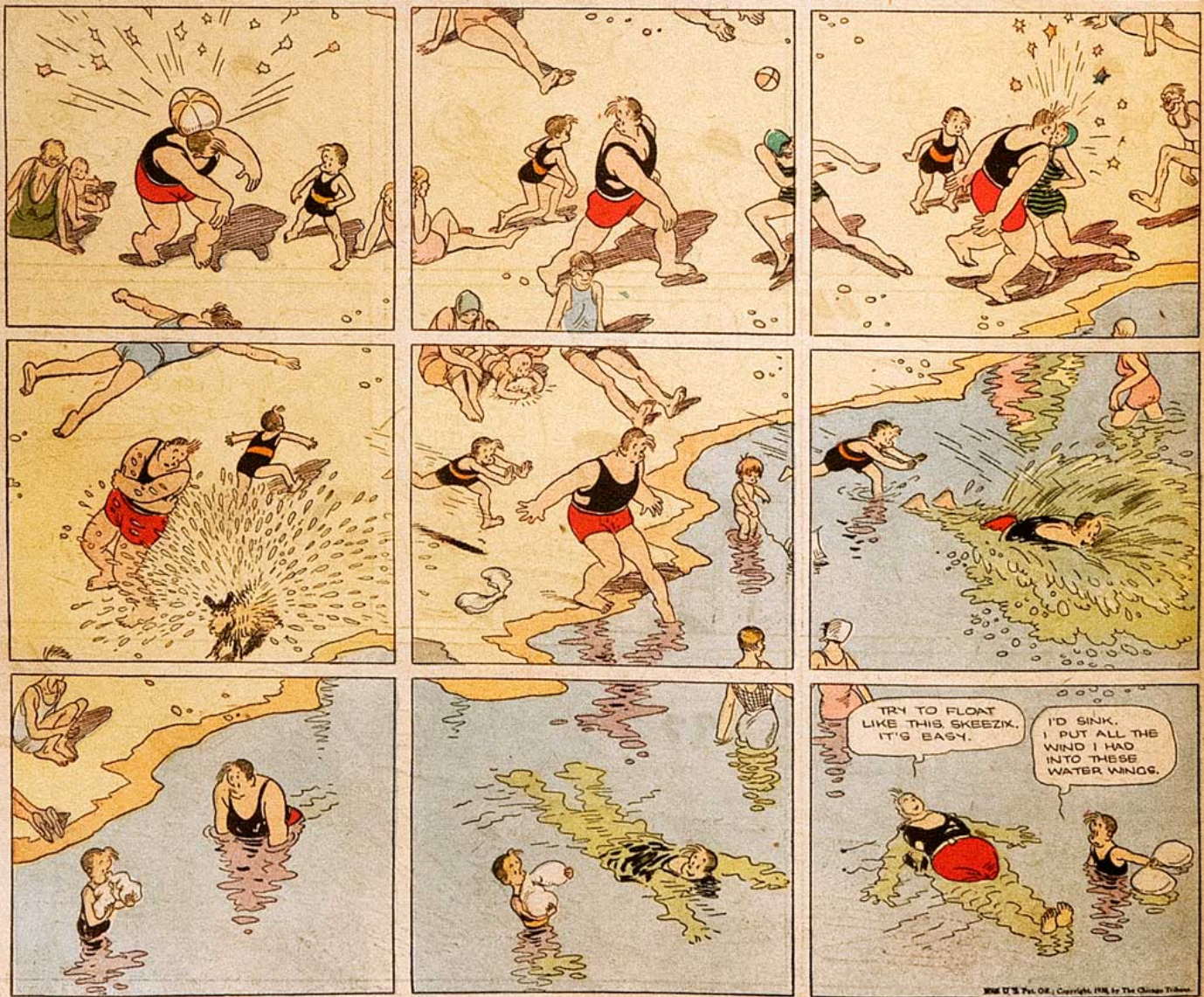


This one is subtler still, look carefully or you might miss it. I am reminded of a line from the Twilight Zone that went something like: "You are about to travel through a new dimension of time and space". That is exactly what Walt and Skeezix do here. On the surface, it is nothing but a stroll across a public beach. Now, step back, and look at the whole thing. The beach is all of a single piece. It continues, seamlessly, behind the lines that divide the panel into squares, while the people on the beach, the shore line etc. and the entire scene, pass behind the squares. Now travel with Walt and Skeezix, as they move through time and space, interacting with this beach that always remains the same.



GASOLINE ALLEY





Skeezix merchandise was quite polite. The drawings are delicate; the colors are sweet and light. Here is my little Gasoline Alley section, pretty much, in its entirety. From the Gasoline Alley Game, "Walt & Skeezix" to handkerchiefs and shoes and a tin toothbrush holder, with its original box and tube of toothpaste, all the art for these products was created by Frank King. Well, perhaps not the "Skeezix Cut Out Toys". They look like they might been helped by someone else's hand. There is an Orphan Annie version of these as well.

Now, we come to the one killer item, well in this case, there are actually two of them. I went through Hell to get the first one, and when a second came along in the original mailing box, I couldn't say, No! I'm talking about, the Skeezix Radio. This colorfully lithographed tin can is actually a Chrystal set. But, in 1924, that's about as close to a real radio as one could get. The first radio stations in the United States had begun just two years before.

Around the canister are drawings that depict the wonderment of Uncle Walt showing Skeezix, who is still very young, the miracle of "Radio." Sharing a pair of earphones, he asks, "Who is that Skeezix, Santa or the Sand Man?" The original box is nothing to get excited about, it's just a plain brown cylinder. Those are the original instructions, behind the Skeezix bank. There is something about this object that holds magic. It captures the essence of a moment when a new technology, radio, entered and changed our lives. My own life was enriched by such moments as these, and every new thing from TV to Stereo was exciting. These days there is a new miracle introduced every day. Such things have become commonplace.



In keeping with the gentle nature of Skee-zix merchandise is this charmingly understated tea set. Not crude, like those later sets that Japan supplied for Mickey and Minnie. This one, is fine china, made in Germany. And the edges were rimmed in gold.



Here are a group of three oilcloth dolls. I have always been somewhat mystified by these. Years ago, I saw the catalogue of the company that manufactured them. There were dozens of designs. Nearly all the 1920s Comic Characters were represented, in a variety of sizes and variations, of which this doll of Uncle Walt, at 26 inches high, was the largest. There were many versions of Skee-zix. This is the first. Each year, as he grew up, which he did do, in real time, in the strip, a new older version of him was released. As these dolls are flat, I never quite understood how a kid would play with them. Later on, variations with separate legs that could stand up, were made. The oilcloth is quite fragile and perishable. It's quite miraculous that any of these survived for 90 years. Skee-zix' dog "Pal" is, perhaps, the rarest figure here.



Moving to the left, in the same showcase, we discover a rather fabulous set of vehicles. They represent, possibly, the most creative packaging in the history of early Comic toys, the "Tootsietoy Funnies"! The toys themselves are just "all right", slightly crude in configuration, although, each does perform some sort of "action". Individually, the tiny diecast vehicles appeal to automotive fans, and Tootsietoy collectors, but they are not something that I would ever choose to own, without the package. The package, without the vehicles, would be mildly amusing, but together, in great condition, they are amazing! Each of the six vehicles involves, at least, one Comic Character. They represent: Uncle Walt in his Roadster, Andy Gump in Old 348, Moon Mullins in the back of a police car, driven by an officer, Kayo on the back of an ice wagon, Mamie and Uncle Willie in a boat and Smitty and Herby riding on a Motorcycle. Each of the figures are animated, and move as the vehicle rolls along.



What makes this set so extraordinary is the interior of the box, with all the vehicles in place. It recreates the colorful elaborate drawing on the cover. The platform of the box becomes the muddy roadway, complete with tire tracks. There is a cut out to hold each TootsieToy vehicle. An illustrated traffic cop tries to maintain order, while Smitty's dog, "Scraps" runs away.



Now, that you have seen all the objects on this shelf, let's pull back and reveal the entire thing.



Then, let's move back, even farther, and show the complete showcase, with the Yellow Kid on the bottom, Andy Gump and Gasoline alley in the middle and Early Comic Characters on the top.



COMIC WINDUPS

If the average old time toy collector tells you that he collects Comic Characters, or happens to have a few in his collection, chances are he is referring to Comic Windups, good old-fashioned windup toys made out of tin. The vast majority of the icons, idols, dolls, and imagery that I collected wouldn't interest him. These good old boys were collecting toys as toys, not as works of art, as I did. My choices were based on how an object looked. The fact that it happened to wind up was secondary. But for many toy collectors, aesthetics play no role in their choice of acquisitions. Their choices are inspired by such matters as rarity and condition, and, for more than a few, the potential of reselling it, one day, to make a buck or two.

When I began collecting, 50 years ago, there was an enthusiastic breed of toy collectors, usually older than me. They had been collecting toys for a long time and even formed clubs and societies to share their enthusiasm with others. And basic comic windup classics, like the Toonerville Trolley, and The Amos and Andy Fresh Air Taxi, had already found securely established homes in their collections. I might also add that Comic toys, the sort seen in the photo below, were considered second class citizens by many of them. They were into bigger heavier things, like mechanical banks and massive vehicles made of cast iron. A tin windup to garner any respect from them had to be hand painted tin, and made close to the Turn of the Century, in France or Germany.



Thus, there was not a lot of room left for discovery, finding known tin toys became more of a challenge in terms of affordability, and being lucky enough to find your own example. That's a fun game to play, and I did it with enthusiasm. But it wasn't like the thrill that comes from seeing something utterly fantastic that, up until that very minute, you had no idea existed. I experienced that with tin toys a few times, but more because of my ignorance and inexperience. Later, I was apt to learn that some old time collector had already written an article about that toy, years before.

And then, on the far right are Smitty on a scooter, Boob McNut in the corner, and the partially hand painted Rudy the Walking Bird, a truly curious mechanism that, while moving backward, makes it appear that he is walking forward. And, last of all, a pristine example of the Toots and Casper's baby, Buttercup. Under Mutt's nose, is the tiny tin Toonerville Trolley. It doesn't do anything, but the standard model windup trolley, bathed in shadow, all the way over on the right, is amazing.

The Toonerville Trolley is a toy that stands apart from all the other Comic windups, by virtue of its unique and original action! It is a fairly "common" toy, a "basic" in the Comic Tin Toy repertoire. You can probably find one, right this minute, on eBay! But do not bid on it, unless, it works! ...

The toy, itself, is relatively attractive, and faithful to the original two-dimensional image in Fontain Fox's Strip. Some, might say, "a little too faithful," for the Skipper, here, like on the printed page, is flat! He is no more than a small flat figure, cut out of lithographed tin, standing at the front of the Trolley. His tiny arms, one resting on the drive crank, that protrudes from the front rail, while the other dangles by his side, are, just, flat cutouts, too.

Now, wind the key and "Let the Magic Begin!" ... The Toonerville Trolley moves forward, wobbling amusingly, on its crooked axles and off-center wheels. Suddenly, it stalls, shutters, and comes to a full stop! And, now, in a moment of exquisite enchantment, the tiny Skipper comes to life! He begins to struggle with the crank, turning it first one way, then, the other. The Trolley shakes. He pauses. But, it does not start. He tries again. And, although, he is only a small flat piece of tin, with no visible means of animation, he moves as if alive, and we feel his frustration, and root for him as he fumbles with that "Dang Blasted" crank. All at once, Success! The Trolley shakes again, and this time, hobbles forward, to enjoy smooth sailing for a few more feet, until it stalls once more.

Then we come to Barney riding Sparkplug . As a work of art it is one of my favorites: In this elegant object, Barney Google and Sparkplug have been transformed into an exquisite sculpture that, also, happens to wind up. Their forms have become more Simplified and Boldly Geometric. Was this due to the keen vision of the artist who designed the toy, or merely the restrictions, that the "Wind-up" medium imposed? It matters, Not! For, either way, the results are no less Great! When I, first, saw this toy, some 35 years ago, it knocked me off my feet. To see what I saw then, and still do, now, look at this Mini-Monument and visualize it twelve feet tall!



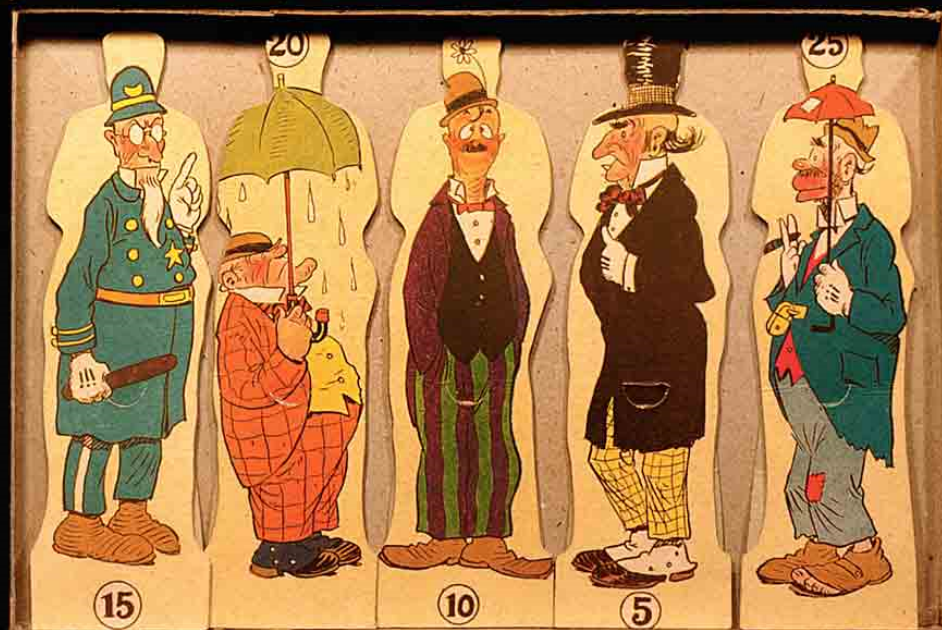
One windup toy that got "discovered", during my days as a beginning collector, was Hi-Way Henry. It was created by the elusive Oscar Hitt, a man who, sort of like me, hovered on the borders of the toy industry. Was Hi-Way Henry a comic strip, as claimed in a poem that came packaged in one of the few known copies of the box, or not? There is no other evidence of it. There was a Hi-Way Henry game and that is it! When the first examples of this toy turned up in the late 1960s, it was hyped up to the temporary status of the rarest and most desirable Comic Toy. A whole mythology developed concerning whether the original stove that hangs on the back was there or not. Reproduction replacement stoves were made. Now this toy is not as rare as it its original publicity pumped it up to be. The game is perhaps the rarer entity.



Meanwhile, the mystery of who Oscar Hitt was, remains. It is known that, at one time, he assisted Rudolph Dirks, drawing the Katzenjammer kids. And he also authored a highly derivative strip of his own, called, "MaMa's Darlings", a Katzenjammer clone. Here is a strange doll I discovered several years ago that was attributed to him.

A Character known as "Snowflake" was also created by Oscar Hitt. Snowflake appeared often, in various sizes, cast in bisque, with rolling eyes. He is also seen on a Nifty Platform toy called, "Snowflake and Swipes."

Oscar Hitt also designed, and signed his name to a few very minor games. Apparently, for a long time, he worked for a game company. These, games are dated 1920. This one, called, "Funny Fellers," was so cheaply made that the figures were squeezed onto existing die-cut soldier shapes.



There is one other windup toy that I should fit in here, either here or with Orphan Annie, because it shares her showcase. It relates to her in color only, and the choice of putting them together is due, more than anything, to lack of space. So I will include him here. I'm speaking of...

"The Little King" This elusive quiet soul tiptoed through my childhood years, charming and mystifying me, simultaneously. An early memory, which I realize contradicts my claim of no nostalgia involved in my motives for collecting, was of one of the small wooden rubber band powered walkers my parents bought me in the 1940s. I think the price was 50 cents. When I learned that there was a large Little king windup toy, as described, erroneously, as "evidence that painted tin was still being used as a means of manufacturing" by Kenny Harmon, the fellow who clobbered together the first book on Comic Character Toys, I believed it! And The Little King windup went onto my priority want list.



The toy pictured in the book passed through many hands, after the death of its original owner. The author, with whom I corresponded, briefly, assured me he had seen other examples of this toy for sale at flea markets in California. He was yanking my chain. No such thing! Meanwhile, the one known toy was peddled far and wide, at an ever escalating price that was way out of my league.

Then, it was Noel Barrett who speculated that this Little King was not a manufactured toy at all, but, actually, a prototype from the Marx factory. Suddenly the price fell. Nobody wanted it! So when it was finally offered to me, at an extremely reasonable price, I jumped at it. Ironically, once I realized that this was the only one, my only chance to possess this image, the whole equation changed. The very thing that turned off others was what, now, made me feel I had to have it. I've seen lots of Marx prototypes. More often than not, they look like crap. But this one, like its subject matter, is simple and great.

When Bambergers Department Store did the "Mickey Mouseum" in 1973, part of the reward I requested was that, afterwards, they would give me the showcases that they built to order for the event. Of course, I supplied them with the generous dimensions. One case, a two tiered box, was specified to display two circles of track for two Mickey Mouse hand cars. When the case came back here, I started using it to protect and display tin toys. Eventually, the case, both levels of it, filled up. One has to remove everything on the top level to get to the one below. And the case got moved into a corner. I'm a little embarrassed to admit that what might constitute a collection for someone else, has become just so many cubic feet of tin to me. Evidence that I have run out of space, and this collection, long ago, needed more to be properly displayed. I'll remove the stuff on top, and try to shine a light down there and get some images of what's inside. It's all good stuff.

Most of the standard repertoire by Marx is there, including both the Merry Makers bands in the original boxes, and, all the piano toys, the German Uncle Wigley car, and every Popeye airplane tower variation etc., etc. I'll focus a camera over there and see what, if anything, shows up.

Wow! That is Amazing. the camera sees things that the human eye, at least mine, cannot. The whole corner, with a little cleaning up, looks rather interesting. Masks and things I intended to deal with later have crept into the pictures, but among all the random tries I made at lighting, I'm sure there is at least one good shot. The only light that ordinarily hits that showcase is from the Orphan Annie lamp on top. With a time exposure it's almost enough.

I put off the decision, overnight, and the fact is, I still can't make up my mind. I'll let you decide! Here is the showcase with a lot of stuff removed on top, and just the Annie lamp alight. This is how it looked for many years, in the days when there was space to spare.





Alan Annie & Son

And here is how that corner looks today, with many things piled on top. In this shot I added a little extra light. It's kind of tall so I'll make it small and run some type along the side.

All of these tin toys are known commodities; either you have them, or you do not. Getting most of them so early offered the thrill of many being new to me. That was the excitement that fueled my quest as a collector. Mere acquisition, brings considerably less pleasure. Discovery, is where it's at. On second thought, better than that, or, at least, the next best thing, is Restoration. I have never hesitated to help a toy in need of all the skills, God, heredity, and many years of art school gave me. I love acquiring a toy that needs me.

This showcase is kind of ancient history to me. When I committed my affection, skills, and money to a toy it was really like a marriage. And I have remained faithful to the toys that Fate sent to me. I have never felt the need to upgrade, or exchange one toy for a, so called, better one. I believe that much of collecting is determined by chance and destiny. What was meant for me, in the first place, was always good enough for me.

I've known collectors obsessed with condition. The ability to examine a toy and pick out its imperfections is what collecting is all about for them. They have no aesthetic criteria, only an eye for detecting faults and imperfections, and an obsession to achieve that glorious state of perfection known as "Mint". Better than Mint, is "Mint in the Box". That is the collector who is driven by the quest for original boxes. Boxes that are often unattractive. These are the kind of games that collectors play when the great discoveries are already made. I knew one, whose display of brand new toys, mint in the boxes, had all the charm of a shelf in Toys R Us. How adventuresome was he? He wouldn't purchase a toy, unless some known collector had one first. That way, he felt assured that it was not fake.

Now, I will turn off the lights, and allow the tin toys, in this not so showy showcase, to continue to hibernate. They are in a place where there is no light to fade them, no dampness to rust them, no playful hands to wake or break them. They are sleeping soundly, in their transparent packing case. They are safe.



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